The Hills Of Hingham

Dallas Lore Sharp

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By Dallas Lore Sharp

THE HILLS OF HINGHAM.
WHERE ROLLS THE OREGON. Illustrated.
THE FACE OF THE FIELDS.
THE LAY OF THE LAND.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
Boston and New York

THE HILLS OF HINGHAM

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HILLS OF HINGHAM

BY

DALLAS LORE SHARP

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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TO THOSE WHO

"*Enforst to seek some shelter nigh at hand*"

HAVE FOUND THE HILLS OF HINGHAM

PREFACE

THIS is not exactly the book I thought it was going to be — though I can say the same of its author for that matter. I had intended this book to set forth some features of the Earth that make it to be preferred to Heaven as a place of present abode, and to note in detail the peculiar attractions of Hingham over Boston, say, — Boston being quite the best *city* on the Earth to live in. I had the book started under the title "And this Our Life"

> . . . exempt from public haunt,
> Finds tongues in trees,''

— when, suddenly, war broke out, the gates of Hell swung wide open into Belgium, and Heaven began to seem the better place. Meanwhile, a series of lesser local troubles had been brewing — drouth, caterpillars, rheumatism, increased commutation rates, more college themes, — more than I could carry back and forth to Hingham, — so that as the writing went on Boston began to seem, not a better place than Hingham, but a nearer place, somehow, and more thoroughly sprayed.

And all this time the book on Life that I thought I was writing was growing chapter by chapter into a defense of that book — a defense of Life — my life here by my fireside with my boys and Her, and the garden and woodlot and hens and bees, and days off and evenings at home and books to read, yes, and books to write — all of which I had taken for granted at twenty, and believed in with a beautiful faith at thirty, when I moved out here into what was then an uninfected forest.

That was the time to have written the book that I had intended this one to be — while the adventure in contentment was still an adventure, while the lure of the land was of fourteen acres yet unexplored, while back to the soil meant exactly what the seed catalogues picture it, and my summer in a garden had not yet passed into its frosty fall. Instead, I have done what no writer ought to do, what none ever did before, unless Jacob wrote, — taken a fourteen-year-old enthusiasm for my theme, to find the enthusiasm grown, as Rachel must have grown by the time Jacob got her, into a philosophy, and like all philosophies, in need of defense.

What men live by is an interesting speculative question, but what men live on, and where they *can* live, — with children to bring up, and their own souls to save, — is an intensely practical question which I have been working at these fourteen years here in the Hills of Hingham.

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I

THE HILLS OF HINGHAM

> "As Surrey hills to mountains grew
> In White of Selborne's loving view"

REALLY there are no hills in Hingham, to speak of, except Bradley Hill and Peartree Hill and Turkey Hill, and Otis and Planter's and Prospect Hills, Hingham being more noted for its harbor and plains. Everybody has heard of Hingham smelts. Mullein Hill is in Hingham, too, but Mullein Hill is only a wrinkle on the face of Liberty Plain, which accounts partly for our having it. Almost anybody can have a hill in Hingham who is content without elevation, a surveyor's term as applied to hills, and a purely accidental property which is not at all essential to real hillness, or the sense of height. We have a stump on Mullein Hill for height. A hill in Hingham is not only possible, but even practical as compared with a Forest in Arden, Arden being altogether too far from town; besides

> " . . . there 's no clock in the forest "

and we have the 8.35 train to catch of a winter morning!

> "A sheep-cote fenced about with olive trees"

sounds more pastoral than apple trees around a house on a hill in Hingham, and it would be more ideal, too, if New England weather were not so much better adapted to apples, and if one did not prefer apples, and if one could raise a family in a sheep-cote.

We started in the sheep-cote, back yonder when all the world was twenty or thereabouts, and when every wild-cherry-bush was an olive tree. But one day the tent caterpillar like a wolf swept down on our fold of cherry-bushes and we fled Arden, never to get back. We lived for a time in town and bought olives in bottles, stuffed ones sometimes, then we got a hill in Hingham, just this side of Arden, still buying our olives, but not our apples now, nor our peaches, nor our musk melons, nor our wood for the open fire. We buy commutation tickets, and pay dearly for the trips back and forth. But we could n't make a living in Arden. Our hill in Hingham is a compromise.

Only folk of twenty and close to twenty live in Arden. We are forty now and no longer poets. When we are really old and our grasshoppers become a burden, we may go back to town where the insects are an entirely different species; but for this exceedingly busy present, between our fading dawn of visions and our coming dusk of dreams, a hill in Hingham, though a compromise, is an almost strategic position, Hingham being more or less of an escape from Boston, and the hill, though not in the Forest of Arden, something of an escape from Hingham, a quaint old village of elm-cooled streets and gentle neighbors. Not that we hate Boston, nor that we pass by on the other side in Hingham. We gladly pick our neighbors up and set them in our motor car and bring them to the foot of the hill. We people of the hills do not hate either crowds or neighbors. We are neighbors ourselves and parts of the city crowds too; and we love to bind up wounds and bring folk to their inns. But we cannot take them farther, for there are no inns out here. We leave them in Hingham and journey on alone into a region where neither thief nor anyone infests the roadsides; where there are no roads in fact, but only driftways and footpaths through the sparsely settled hills.

We leave the crowd on the streets, we leave the kind neighbor at his front gate, and travel on, not very far, but on alone into a wide quiet country where we shall have a chance, perhaps, of meeting with ourselves — the day's great adventure, and far to find; yet this is what we have come out to the hills for.

Not for apples nor wood fires have we a hill in Hingham; not for hens and a bigger house, and leisure, and conveniences, and excitements; not for ways to earn a living, nor for ways to spend it. Stay in town for that. There "you can even walk alone without being bored. No long, uneventful stretches of bleak, wintry landscape, where nothing moves, not even the train of thought. No benumbed and self-centered trees holding out pathetic frozen branches for sympathy. Impossible to be introspective here. Fall into a brown or blue study and you are likely to be run over. Thought is brought to the surface by mental massage. No time to dwell upon your beloved self. So many more interesting things to think about. And the changing scenes unfold more rapidly than a moving-picture reel."

This sounds much more interesting than the country. And it is more interesting, Broadway asking nothing of a country lane for excitement. And back they go who live on excitement; while some of us take this same excitement as the best of reasons for double windows and storm doors and country life the year through.

You can think in the city, but it is in spite of the city. Gregariousness and individuality do not abide together; nor is external excitement the cause or the concomitant of thought. In fact this "mental massage" of the city is to real thinking about what a mustard-plaster is to circulation — a counter-irritant. The thinker is one who finds himself (quite impossible on Broadway!); and then finds himself *interesting* — more interesting than Broadway — another impossibility within the city limits. Only in the country can he do that, in a wide and negative environment of quiet, room, and isolation — necessary conditions for the enjoyment of one's own mind. Thought is a country product and comes in to the city for distribution, as books are gathered and distributed by libraries, but not written in libraries. It is against the wide, drab background of the country that thought most naturally reacts, thinking being only the excitement of a man discovering himself, as he is compelled to do, where bending horizon and arching sky shift as he shifts in all creation's constant endeavor to swing around and center on him. Nothing centers on him in the city, where he thinks by "mental massage" — through the scalp with laying on of hands, as by benediction or shampoo.

But for the busy man, say of forty, are the hills of Hingham with their adventure possible? Why, there is nothing ailing the man of forty except that he now is neither young nor old, nor rich, the chances are; nor a dead failure either, but just an average man; yet he is one of God's people, if the Philistines were (He brought them from Caphtor) and the Syrians (those He brought from Kir). The man of forty has a right to so much of the Promised Land as a hill in Hingham.

But he is afraid to possess it because it is so far from work and friends and lighted streets. He is afraid of the dark and of going off to sit down upon a stump for converse with himself. He is afraid he won't get his work done. If his work were planting beans, he would get none planted surely while on the stump; but so he might be saved the ungracious task of giving away his surplus beans to bean-ridden friends for the summer. A man, I believe, can plant too many beans. He might not finish the freshman themes either. But when was the last freshman theme ever done? Finish them if he can, he has only baked the freshmen into sophomores, and so emptied the ovens for another batch of dough. He shall never put a crust on the last freshman, and not much of a crust on the last sophomore either, the Almighty refusing to coöperate with him in the baking. Let him do the best he can, not the most he can, and quit for Hingham and the hills where he can go out to a stump and sit down.

College students also are a part of that world which can be too much with us, cabbages, too, if we are growing cabbages. We don't do overmuch, but we are over-busy. We want too much.

Buy a little hill in Hingham, and even out here, unless you pray and go apart often to your stump, your desire will be toward every hill in sight and the valleys between.

According to the deed my hill comprises "fourteen acres more or less" of an ancient glacier, a fourteen-acre heap of unmitigated gravel, which now these almost fourteen years I have been trying to clear of stones, picking, picking for a whole Stone Age, and planning daily to buy the nine-acre ridge adjoining me which is gravelier than mine. By actual count we dumped five hundred cartloads of stones into the foundation of a porch when making over the house recently — and still I am out in the garden picking, picking, living in the Stone Age still, and planning to prolong the stay by nine acres more that are worse than these I now have, nine times worse for stones!

I shall never cease picking stones, I presume, but perhaps I can get out a permanent injunction against myself, to prevent my buying that neighboring gravel hill, and so find time to climb my own and sit down among the beautiful moth-infested oak trees.

I do sit down, and I thrust my idle hands hard into my pockets to keep them from the Devil who would have them out at the moths instantly — an evil job, killing moths, worse than picking stones!

Nothing is more difficult to find anywhere than time to sit down with yourself, except the ability to enjoy the time after finding it, — even here on a hill in Hingham, if the hill is in woods. There are foes to face in the city and floods to stem out here, but let no one try to fight several acres of caterpillars. When you see them coming, climb your stump and wait on the Lord. He is slow; and the caterpillars are horribly fast. True. Yet I say, To your stump and wait — and learn how restful a thing it is to sit down by faith. For the town sprayer is a vain thing. The roof of green is riddled. The rafters overhead reach out as naked as in December. Ruin looks through. On sweep the devouring hosts in spite of arsenate of lead and "wilt" disease and Calasoma beetles. Nothing will avail; nothing but a new woodlot planted with saplings that the caterpillars do not eat. Sit still my soul, and know that when these oak trees fall there will come up the fir tree and the pine tree and the shagbark, distasteful to the worms; and they shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

This is good forestry, and good philosophy — a sure handling of both worms and soul.

But how hard to follow! I would so like to help the Lord. Not to do my own share only; but to shoulder the Almighty's too, saying —

> "If it were done when 't is done, then 't were well
> It were done quickly";

and I up and do it. But it does not stay done. I had sprayed, creosoted, cut, trimmed, cemented, only to see the trees die, until I was forced to rest upon the stump, when I saw what I had been blind to before: that the pine trees were tipped with cones, and that there in the tops were the red squirrels shucking and giving the winged seeds to the winds to sow; and that even now up the wooded slope below me, where the first of the old oaks had perished, was climbing a future grove of seedling pines.

The forests of Arden are not infested with gypsy moths, nor the woods of Heaven either, I suppose; but the trees in the hills of Hingham are. And yet they are the trees of the Lord; the moths are his also, and the caring for them. I am caring for a few college freshmen and my soul. I shall go forth to my work until the evening. The Lord can take the night-shift; for it was He who instituted the twilight, and it is He who must needs be responsible till the morning.

So here a-top my stump in the beleaguered woodlot I sit with idle hands, and no stars falling, and the universe turning all alone!

To wake up at forty a factory hand! a floorwalker! a banker! a college professor! a man about town or any other respectably successful, humdrum, square wooden peg-of-a-thing in a square tight hole! There is an evil, says the Preacher, which I have seen under the sun — the man of about forty who has become moderately successful and automatic, but who has not, and now knows he cannot, set the world on fire. This is a vanity and it is an evil disease.

From running the universe at thirty the man of forty finds himself running with it, paced before, behind, and beside, by other runners and by the very stars in their courses. He has struck the universal gait, a strong steady stride that will carry him to the finish, but not among the medals.

This is an evil thing. Forty is a dangerous age. The wild race of twenty, the staggering step of eighty, are full of peril, but not so deadly as the even, mechanical going of forty; for youth has the dash in hand; old age has ceased to worry and is walking in; while the man of forty is right in the middle of the run, grinding along on his second wind with the cheering all ahead of him.

In fact, the man of forty finds himself halfway across the street with the baby carriage in his hands, and touring cars in front of him, and limousines behind him, and the hand-of-the-law staying and steadying him on his perilous course.

Life may be no busier at forty than at thirty, but it is certainly more expensive. Work may not be so hard, but the facts of life are a great deal harder, the hardest, barest of them being the here-and-now of all things, the dead levelness of forty — an irrigated plain that has no hill of vision, no valley of dream. But it may have its hill in Hingham with a bit of meadow down below.

Mullein Hill is the least of all hills, even with the added stump; but looking down through the trees I can see the gray road, and an occasional touring car, like a dream, go by; and off on the Blue Hills of Milton — higher hills than ours in Hingham — hangs a purple mist that from our ridge seems the very robe and veil of vision.

The realities are near enough to me here crawling everywhere, indeed; but close as I am to the flat earth I can yet look down at things — at the road and the passing cars; and off at things — the hills and the distant horizon; and so I can escape for a time that level stare into the face of things which sees them as *things* close and real, but seldom as *life*, far off and whole.

Perhaps I have never seen life whole; I may need a throne and not a hill and a stump for that; but here in the wideness of the open skies, in the sweet quiet, in the hush that often fills these deep woods, I sometimes see life free, not free from men and things, but unencumbered, coming to meet me out of the morning and passing on with me toward the sunset until, at times, the stepping westward. the uneventful onwardness of life has

> " . . . seemed to be
> A kind of heavenly destiny"

and, even the back-and-forth of it, a divine thing.

This knowledge is too wonderful for me; I cannot keep fast hold of it; yet to know occasionally that you are greater than your rhetoric, or your acres of stones, or your woods of worms, worms that may destroy your trees though you spray, is to steady and establish your soul, and vastly to comfort it!

To be greater than your possessions, than your accomplishments, than your desires — greater than you know, than anybody at home knows or will admit! So great that you can leave your plough in the furrow, that you can leave the committees to meet, and the trees to fall, and the sun to hurry on, while you take your seat upon a stump, assured from many a dismaying observation that the trees will fall anyhow, that the sun will hasten on its course, and that the committees, even the committees, will meet and do business whether you attend or not!

This is bed-rock fact, the broad and solid bottom for a cheerful philosophy. To know that they can get on without you (more knowledge than many ever attain!) is the beginning of wisdom;

and to learn that you can get on without them — at the close of the day, and out here on your hill in Hingham — this is the end of understanding.

If I am no more than the shoes I stitch, or the lessons I peg, and the college can so calmly move on without me, how small I am! Let me hope that I am useful there, and useful as a citizen-at-large; but I know that I am chiefly and utterly dispensable at large, everywhere at large, even in Hingham. But not here on my hilltop. Here I am indispensable. In the short shift from my classroom, from chair to hill, from doing to being, I pass from a means into an end, from a part in the scheme of things to the scheme of things itself.

Here stands my hill on the highway from dawn to dusk, and just where the bending walls of the sky center and encircle it. This is not only a large place, with room and verge enough; it is also a chief place, where start the north and south and east and west, and the gray crooked road over which I travel daily.

I can trace the run of the road from my stump on the hill, off to where it bends on the edge of night for its returning and rest here.

> "Let me live in a house by the side of the road,"

sings the poet; but as for me, after traveling all day let me come back to a house at the end of the road — for in returning and rest shall a man be saved, in quietness and confidence shall he find strength. Nowhere shall he find that quietness and confidence in larger measure than here in the hills. And where shall he return to more rest?

There are men whose souls are like these hills, simple, strong, quiet men who can heal and restore; and there are books that help like the hills, simple elemental, large books; music, and sleep, and prayer, and play are healing too; but none of these cure and fill one with a quietness and confidence as deep as that from the hills, even from the little hills and the small fields and the vast skies of Hingham; a confidence and joy in the earth, perhaps, rather than in heaven, and yet in heaven too.

If it is not also a steadied thinking and a cleared seeing, it is at least a mental and moral convalescence that one gets — out of the landscape, out of its largeness, sweetness and reality. I am quickly conscious on the hills of space all about me — room for myself, room for the things that crowd and clutter me; and as these arrange and set themselves in order, I am aware of space within me, of freedom and wideness there, of things in order, of doors unlocked and windows opened, through which I look out upon a new young world, new like the morning, young like the seedling pines on the slope — young and new like my soul!

Now I can go back to my classroom. Now I can read themes once more. Now I can gaze into the round, moon-eyed face of youth and have faith — as if my chair were a stump, my classroom a wooded hillside covered with young pines, seedlings of the Lord, and full of sap, and proof against the worm.

Yet these are the same youth who yesterday wrote the "Autobiography of a Fountain Pen" and "The Exhilarations of the Straw-Ride" and the essays on "The Beauties of Nature." It is I who am not the same. I have been changed, renewed, having seen from my stump the face of eternal youth in the freshmen pines marching up the hillside, in the young brook playing and pursuing through the meadow, in the young winds over the trees, the young stars in the skies, the young moon riding along the horizon

> "With the auld moon in her arm" —

youth immortal, and so, unburdened by its withered load of age.

I come down from the hill with a soul resurgent, — strong like the heave that overreaches the sag of the sea, — and bold in my faith — to a lot of college students as the hope of the world!

From the stump in the woodlot I see not only the face of things but the course of things, that they are moving past me, over me, and round and round me their fixed center — for the horizon to bend about, for the sky to arch over, for the highways to start from, for every influence and interest between Hingham and Heaven to focus on.

"All things journey sun and moon
Morning noon and afternoon,
Night and all her stars," —

and they all journey about me on my stump in the hilltop.

We love human nature; we love to get back to it in New York and Boston, — for a day, for six months in the winter even, — but we need to get back to the hills at night. We are a conventional, gregarious, herding folk. Let an American get rich and he builds a grand house in the city. Let an Englishman get rich and he moves straight into the country — out to such a spot as Bradley Hill in Hingham.

There are many of the city's glories and conveniences lacking here on Mullein Hill, but Mullein Hill has some of the necessities that are lacking in the city — wide distances and silent places, and woods and stumps where you can sit down and feel that you are greater than anything in sight. In the city the buildings are too vast; the people are too many. You might feel greater than any two or three persons there, perhaps, but not greater than nearly a million.

No matter how centered and serene I start from Hingham, a little way into Boston and I am lost. First I begin to hurry (a thing unnecessary in Hingham) for everybody else is hurrying; then I must get somewhere; everybody else is getting somewhere, getting everywhere. For see them in front of me and behind me, getting there ahead of me and coming after me to leave no room for me when I shall arrive! But when shall I and where shall I arrive? And what shall I arrive for? And who am I that I would arrive? I look around for the encircling horizon, and up for the overarching sky, and in for the guiding purpose;

but instead of a purpose I am hustled forward by a crowd, and at the bottom of a street far down beneath such overhanging walls as leave me but a slit of smoky sky. I am in the hands of a force mightier than I, in the hands of the police force at the street corners, and am carried across to the opposite curb through a breaker that rolls in front of me again at the next crossing. So I move on, by external compulsion, knowing, as I move, by a kind of mental contagion, feeling by a sort of proxy, and putting my trust everywhere in advertising and the police.

Thus I come, it may be, into the Public Library, "where is all the recorded wit of the world, but none of the recording," — where Shakespeare and Old Sleuth and Pansy look all alike and as readable as the card catalogues, or the boy attendants, or the signs of the Zodiac in the vestibule floor.

Who can read all these books? Who wishes to read any of these books? They are too many — more books in here than men on the street outside! And how dead they are in here, wedged side by side in this vast sepulcher of human thought!

I move among them dully, the stir of the streets coming to me as the soughing of wind on the desert or the wash of waves on a distant shore. Here I find a book of my own among the dead. I read its inscription curiously. I must have written it — when I was alive æons ago, and far from here. But why did I? For see the unread, the shelved, the numbered, the buried books!

Let me out to the street! Dust we are, not books, and unto dust, good fertile soil, not paper and ink, we shall return. No more writing for me — but breathing and eating and jostling with the good earthy people outside, laughing and loving and dying with them!

The sweet wind in Copley Square! The sweet smell of gasoline! The sweet scream of electric horns!

And how sweet — how fat and alive and friendly the old colored hack driver, standing there by the stone post! He has a number on his cap; he is catalogued somewhere, but not in the library. Thank heaven he is no book, but just a good black human being. I rush up and shake hands with him. He nearly falls into his cab with astonishment; but I must get hold of life again, and he looks so real and removed from letters!

"Uncle!" I whisper, close in his ear, "have ye got it? Quick —

> " 'Cross me twice wid de raabbit foot —
> Dar 's steppin' at de doo' !
> Cross me twice wid de raabbit foot —
> Dar 's creakin' on de floo' ! ' "

He makes the passes, and I turn down Boylston Street, a living thing once more with face toward — the hills of Hingham.

It is five o'clock, and a winter evening, and all the street pours forth to meet me — some of them coming with me bound for Hingham, surely, as all of them are bound for a hill somewhere and a home.

I love the city at this winter hour. This home-hurrying crowd — its excitement of escape! its eagerness and expectancy! its camaraderie! The arc-lights overhead glow and splutter with the joy they see on the faces beneath them.

It is nearly half-past five as I turn into Winter Street. Now the very stores are closing. Work has ceased. Drays and automobiles are gone. The two-wheeled fruit man is going from his stand at the Subway entrance. The street is filled from wall to wall with men and women, young women and young men, fresher, more eager, more excited, more joyous even than the lesser crowd of shoppers down Boylston Street. They don't notice me particularly. No one notices any one particularly, for the lights overhead see us all, and we all understand as we cross and dodge and lockstep and bump and jostle through this deep narrow place of closing doors toward home. Then the last rush at the station, that nightly baptism into human brotherhood as we plunge into the crowd and are carried through the gates and into our train — which is speeding far out through the dark before I begin to come to myself — find myself leaving the others, separating, individualizing, taking on definite shape and my own being. The train is grinding in at my station, and I drop out along the track in the dark alone.

I gather my bundles and hug them to me, feeling not the bread and bananas, but only the sense of possession, as I step off down the track. Here is my automobile. Two miles of back-country road lie before me. I drive slowly, the stars overhead, but not far away, and very close about me the deep darkness of the woods — and silence and space and shapes invisible, and voices inaudible as yet to my city-dinned ears and staring eyes. But sight returns, and hearing, till soon my very fingers, feeling far into the dark, begin to see and hear.

And now I near the hill: these are my woods; this is my gravel bank; that my meadow, my wall, my postbox, and up yonder among the trees shines my light. They are expecting me, She, and the boys, and the dog, and the blazing fire, the very trees up there, and the watching stars.

How the car takes the hill — as if up were down, and wheels were wings, and just as if the boys and the dog and the dinner and the fire were all waiting for *it!* As they are, of course, it and me. I open up the throttle, I jam the shrieking whistle, and rip around the bend in the middle of the hill, — puppy yelping down to meet me. The noise we make as the lights flash on, as the big door rolls back, and we come to our nightly standstill inside the boy-filled barn! They drag me from the wheel — puppy yanking at my trouser leg; they pounce upon my bundles;

they hustle me toward the house, where, in the lighted doorway more welcome waits me — and questions, batteries of them, even puppy joining the attack!

Who would have believed I had seen and done all this, — had any such adventurous trip, — lived any such significant day, — catching my regular 8.35 train as I did!

But we get through the dinner and some of the talk and then the out-loud reading before the fire; then while she is tucking the children in bed, I go out to see that all is well about the barn.

How the night has deepened since my return! No wind stirs. The hill-crest blazes with the light of the stars. Such an earth and sky! I lock the barn, and crossing the field, climb the ridge to the stump. The bare woods are dark with shadow and deep with the silence of the night. A train rumbles somewhere in the distance, then the silence and space reach off through the shadows, infinitely far off down the hillside; and the stars gather in the tops of the trees.

II

THE OPEN FIRE

IT is a January night.

> " . . . . Enclosed
> From Chaos and the inroad of Darkness old,"

we sit with our book before the fire. Outside in the night ghostly shapes pass by, ghostly faces press against the window, and at the corners of the house ghostly voices pause for parley, muttering thickly through the swirl and smother of the snow. Inside burns the fire, kindling into glorious pink and white peonies on the nearest wall and glowing warm and sweet on her face as she reads. The children are in bed. She is reading aloud to me:

"'I wish the good old times would come again,' she said, 'when we were not quite so rich. I do not mean that I want to be poor, but there was a middle state' — so she was pleased to ramble on — 'in which, I am sure, we were a great deal happier.'"

Her eyes left the familiar page, wandering far away beyond the fire.

"Is it so hard to bear up under two thousand five hundred a year?" I asked.

The gleam of the fire, or perhaps a fancy out of the far-beyond, lighted her eyes as she answered,

"We began on four hundred and fifty a year; and we were perfectly —"

"Yes, but you forget the parsonage; that was rent free!"

"Four hundred and fifty with rent free — and we had everything we could —"

"You forget again that we had n't even one of our four boys."

Her gaze rested tenderly upon the little chairs between her and the fire, just where the boys had left them at the end of their listening an hour before.

"If you had allowed me," she went on, "I was going to say how glad we ought to be that we are not quite so rich as — "

"We should like to be?" I questioned.

"'A purchase'" — she was reading again — "'is but a purchase, now that you have money enough and to spare. Formerly it used to be a triumph. Do you not remember the brown suit, which you made to hang upon you, till all your friends cried shame upon you, it grew so threadbare — and all because of that folio Beaumont and Fletcher which you dragged home late at night from Barker's in Covent Garden? Do you remember how we eyed it for weeks before we could make up our minds to the purchase, and had not come to a determination till it was near ten o'clock of the Saturday night, when you set off from Islington, fearing — '

"Is n't this exactly our case?" she asked, interrupting herself for no other purpose than to prolong the passage she was reading.

"Truly," I replied, trying hard to hide a note of eagerness in my voice, for I had kept my battery masked these many months, "only Lamb wanted an old folio, whereas we need a new car. I have driven that old machine for five years and it was second-hand to begin with."

I watched for the effect of the shot, but evidently I had not got the range, for she was saying,

"Is there a sweeter bit in all of 'Elia' than this, do you think?

"'—And when the old bookseller with some grumbling opened his shop, and by the twinkling taper (for he was setting bedwards) lighted out the relic from his dusty treasures—and when you lugged it home, wishing it were twice as cumbersome—'"

She had paused again. To know when to pause! how to make the most of your author! to draw out the linked sweetness of a passage to its longest—there reads your loving reader!

"You see," laying her hand on mine, "old books and old friends are best, and I should think you had really rather have a nice safe old car than any new one. Thieves don't take old cars, as you know. And you can't insure them, that's a comfort! And cars don't skid and collide just because they are *old*, do they? And you never have to scold the children about the paint and — and the old thing *does* go — what do you think Lamb would say about old cars?"

"Lamb be hanged on old cars!" and I sent the sparks flying with a fresh stick.

"Well, then let's hear the rest of him on '*Old China*.'" And so she read, while the fire burned, and outside swept the winter storm.

I have a weakness for out-loud reading and Lamb, and a peculiar joy in wood fires when the nights are dark and snowy. My mind is not, after all, *much* set on automobiles then; there is such a difference between a wild January night on Mullein Hill and an automobile show — or any other show. If St. Bernard of Cluny had been an American and not a monk, I think Jerusalem the Golden might very likely have been a quiet little town like Hingham, all black with a winter night and lighted for the Saint with a single open fire. Anyhow I cannot imagine the mansions of the Celestial City without fireplaces. I don't know how the equatorial people do; I have never lived on the equator, and I have no desire to — nor in any other place where it is too hot for a fireplace, or where wood is so scarce that one is obliged to substitute a gas-log. I wish I could build an open hearth into every lowly home and give every man who loves out-loud reading a copy of Lamb and sticks enough for a fire. I wish — is it futile to wish that besides the fireplace and the sticks I might add a great many more winter evenings to the round of the year? I would leave the days as they are in their beautiful and endless variety, but the long, shut-in winter evenings

> "When young and old in circle
> About the firebrands close —"

these I would multiply, taking them away from June to give to January, could I supply the fire and the boys and the books and the reader to go with them.

And I often wonder if more men might not supply these things for themselves? There are January nights for all, and space enough outside of city and suburb for simple firesides; books enough also; yes, and readers-aloud if they are given the chance. But the boys are hard to get. They might even come girls. Well, what is the difference, anyway? Suppose mine had been dear things with ribbons in their hair — not these four, but four more? Then all the glowing circle about the fireplace had been filled, the chain complete, a link of fine gold for every link of steel! Ah! the cat hath nine lives, as Phisologus saith; but a man hath as many lives as he hath sons, with two lives besides for every daughter. So it must always seem to me when I remember the precious thing that vanished from me before I could even lay her in her mother's arms. She would have been, I think, a full head taller than the oldest boy, and wiser than all four of the boys, being a girl.

The real needs of life are few, and to be had by most men, even though they include children and an automobile. Second-hand cars are very cheap, and the world seems full of orphans — how many orphans now! It is n't a question of getting the things; the question is, What are the necessary things?

First, I say, a fireplace. A man does well to build his fireplace first instead of the garage. Better than a roof over one's head is a fire at one's feet; for what is there deadlier than the chill of a fireless house? The fireplace first, unless indeed he have the chance, as I had when a boy, to get him a pair of tongs.

The first piece of household furniture I ever purchased was a pair of old tongs. I was a lad in my teens. "Five — five — five — five — v-v-v-ve *will* you make it ten?" I heard the auctioneer cry as I passed the front gate. He held a pair of brass-headed hearth tongs above his head, waving them wildly at the unresponsive bidders.

"Will *you* make it ten?" he yelled at me as the last comer.

"Ten," I answered, a need for fire tongs, that blistering July day, suddenly overcoming me.

"And sold for ten cents to the boy in the gate," shouted the auctioneer. "Will somebody throw in the fireplace to go with them!"

I took my tongs rather sheepishly, I fear, rather helplessly, and got back through the gate, for I was on foot and several miles from home. I trudged on for home carrying those tongs with me all the way, not knowing why, not wishing to throw them into the briers for they were very old and full of story, and I — was very young and full of — I cannot tell, remembering what little *boys* are made of. And now here they lean against the hearth, that very pair. I packed them in the bottom of my trunk when I started for college; I saved them through the years when our open fire was a "base-burner," and then a gas-radiator in a city flat. Moved, preserved, "married" these many years, they stand at last where the boy must have dreamed them standing — that hot July day, how long, long ago!

But why should a boy have dreamed such dreams? And what was it in a married old pair of brass-headed hearth tongs that a boy in his teens should have bought them at auction and then have carried them to college with him, rattling about on the bottom of his trunk? For it was not an over-packed trunk. There were the tongs on the bottom and a thirty-cent edition of "The Natural History of Selborne" on the top — that is all. That is all the boy remembers. These two things, at least, are all that now remain out of the trunkful he started with from home — the tongs for sentiment, and for friendship the book.

"Are you listening?" she asks, looking up to see if I have gone to sleep.

"Yes, I 'm listening."

"And dreaming?"

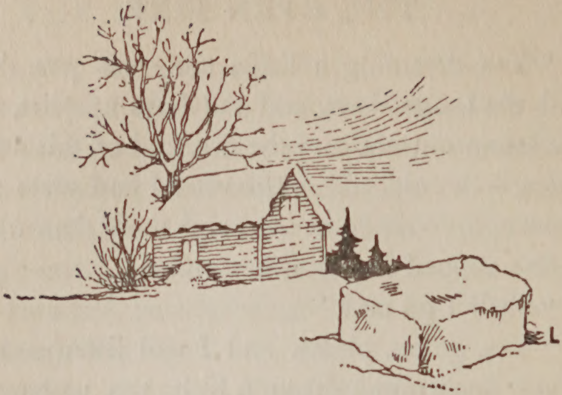
"Yes, dreaming a little, too, — of you, dear, and the tongs there, and the boys upstairs, and the storm outside, and the fire, and of this sweet room, — an old, old dream that I had years and years ago, — all come true, and more than true."

She slipped her hand into mine.

"Shall I go on?"

"Yes, go on, please, and I will listen — and, if you don't mind, dream a little, too, perhaps."

There is something in the fire and the rise and fall of her voice, something so infinitely soothing in its tones, and in Lamb, and in such a night as this — so vast and fearful, but so futile in its bitter sweep about the fire — that while one listens one must really dream too.



III

THE ICE CROP

THE ice-cart with its weighty tongs never climbs our Hill, yet the ice-chest does not lack its clear blue cake of frozen February. We gather our own ice as we gather our own hay and apples. The small ice-house under the trees has just been packed with eighteen tons of "black" ice, sawed and split into even blocks, tier on tier, the harvest of the curing cold, as loft and cellar are still filled with crops made in the summer's curing heat. So do the seasons overlap and run together! So do they complement and multiply each other! Like the star-dust of Saturn they belt our fourteen-acre planet, not with three rings, nor four, but with twelve, a ring for every month, a girdle of twelve shining circles running round the year—the tinkling ice of February in the goblet of October!—the apples of October red and ripe on what might have been April's empty platter!

He who sows the seasons and gathers the months into ice-house and barn lives not from sunup to sundown, revolving with the hands of the clock, but, heliocentric, makes a daily circuit clear around the sun—the smell of mint in the hay-mow, a reminder of noontime passed; the prospect of winter in the growing garden, a gentle warning of night coming on. Twelve times one are twelve—by so many times are months and meanings and values multiplied for him whose fourteen acres bring forth abundantly—provided that the barns on the place be kept safely small.

Big barns are an abomination unto the Lord, and without place on a wise man's estate. As birds have nests, and foxes dens, so may any man have a place to lay his head, with a *mansion* prepared in the sky for his soul.

Big barns are as foolish for the ice-man as for others. The barns of an ice-man must needs be large, yet they are over-large if he can say to his soul: "Soul, thou hast much ice laid up for many days; eat, drink, and be merry among the cakes" — and when the autumn comes he still has a barn full of solid cemented cakes that must be sawed out! No soul can be merry long on ice — nor on sugar, nor shoes, nor stocks, nor hay, nor anything of that sort in great quantities. He who builds great barns for ice, builds a refrigerator for his soul. Ice must never become a man's only crop; for then winter means nothing but ice; and the year nothing but winter; for the year 's never at the spring for him, but always at February or when the ice is making and the mercury is down to zero.

As I have already intimated, a safe kind of ice-house is one like mine, that cannot hold more than eighteen tons — a year's supply (shrinkage and Sunday ice-cream and other extras provided for). Such an ice-house is not only an ice-house, it is also an act of faith, an avowal of confidence in the stability of the frame of things, and in their orderly continuance. Another winter will come, it proclaims, when the ponds will be pretty sure to freeze. If they don't freeze, and never do again — well, who has an ice-house big enough in that event?

My ice-house is one of life's satisfactions; not architecturally, of course, for there has been no great development yet in ice-house lines, and this one was home-done; it is a satisfaction morally, being one thing I have done that is neither more nor less. I have the big-barn weakness — the desire for ice — for ice to melt — as if I were no wiser than the ice-man! I builded bigger than I knew when I put the stone porches about the dwelling-house, consulting in my pride the architect first instead of the town assessors. I took no counsel of pride in building the ice-house, nor of fear, nor of my love of ice. I said: "I will build me a house to carry a year's supply of ice and no more, however the price of ice may rise, and even with the risk of facing seven hot and iceless years. I have laid up enough things among the moths and rust. Ice against the rainy day I will provide, but ice for my children and my children's children, ice for a possible cosmic reversal that might twist the equator over the poles, I will not provide for. Nor will I go into the ice business."

Nor did I! And I say the building of that ice-house has been an immense satisfaction to me. I entertain my due share of

> "Gorgons, and hydras and chimæras dire";

but a cataclysm of the proportions mentioned above would as likely as not bring on another Ice Age, or indeed —

> ". . . run back and fetch the Age of Gold."

To have an ice-house, and yourself escape cold storage — that seems to me the thing.

I can fill the house in a single day, and so trade a day for a year; or is it not rather that I crowd a year into a day? Such days are possible. It is not any day that I can fill the ice-house. Ice-day is a chosen, dedicated day, one of the year's high festivals, the Day of First Fruits, the ice crop being the year's earliest harvest. Hay is made when the sun shines, a condition sometimes slow in coming; but ice of the right quality and thickness, with roads right, and sky right for harvesting, requires a conjunction of right conditions so difficult as to make a good ice-day as rare as a day in June. June! why, June knows no such glorious weather as that attending the harvest of the ice.

This year it fell early in February — rather late in the season; so late, in fact, that, in spite of my faith in winter, I began to grow anxious — something no one on a hill in Hingham need ever do. Since New Year's Day unseasonable weather had prevailed: shifty winds, uncertain skies, rain and snow and sleet — that soft, spongy weather when the ice soaks and grows soggy. By the middle of January what little ice there had been in the pond was gone, and the ice-house was still empty.

Toward the end of the month, however, the skies cleared, the wind settled steadily into the north, and a great quiet began to deepen over the fields, a quiet that at night grew so tense you seemed to hear the close-glittering heavens snapping with the light of the stars. Everything seemed charged with electric cold; the rich soil of the garden struck fire like flint beneath your feet; the tall hillside pines, as stiff as masts of steel, would suddenly crack in the brittle silence, with a sharp report; and at intervals throughout the taut boreal night you could hear a hollow rumbling running down the length of the pond — the ice being split with the wide iron wedge of the cold.

Down and down for three days slipped the silver column in the thermometer until at eight o'clock on the fourth day it stood just above zero. Cold? It was splendid weather! with four inches of ice on the little pond behind the ridge, glare ice, black as you looked across it, but like a pane of plate glass as you peered into it at the stirless bottom below; smooth glare ice untouched by the wing of the wind or by even the circling runner of the skater-snow. Another day and night like this and the solid square-edged blocks could come in.

I looked at the glass late that night and found it still falling. I went on out beneath the stars. It may have been the tightened telephone wires overhead, or the frozen ground beneath me ringing with the distant tread of the coming north wind, yet over these, and with them, I heard the singing of a voiceless song, no louder than the winging hum of bees, but vaster — the earth and air responding to a starry lyre as some Æolian harper, sweeping through the silvery spaces of the night, brushed the strings with her robes of jeweled cold.

The mercury stood at zero by one o'clock. A biting wind had risen and blew all the next day. Eight inches of ice by this time. One night more and the crop would be ripe. And it was ripe.

I was out before the sun, tramping down to the pond with pike and saw, the team not likely to be along for half an hour yet, the breaking of the marvelous day all mine. Like apples of gold in baskets of silver were the snow-covered ridges in the light of the slow-coming dawn. The wind had fallen, but the chill seemed the more intense, so silently it took hold. My breath hung about me in little gray clouds, covering my face, and even my coat, with rime. As the hurt passed from my fingers, my eyebrows seemed to become detached, my cheeks shrunk, my flesh suddenly free of cumbering clothes. But in half a minute the rapid red blood would come beating back, spreading over me and out from me, with the pain, and then the glow, of life, of perfect life that seemed itself to feed upon the consuming cold.

No other living thing was yet abroad, no stir or sound except the tinkling of tiny bells all about me that were set to swinging as I moved along. The crusted snow was strewn with them; every twig was hung, and every pearl-bent grass blade. Then off through the woods rang the chime of louder bells, sleigh bells; then the shrill squeal of iron runners over dry snow; then the broken voices of men; and soon through the winding wood road came the horses, their bay coats white, as all things were, with the glittering dust of the hoar frost.

It was beautiful work. The mid-afternoon found us in the thick of a whirling storm, the grip of the cold relaxed, the woods abloom with the clinging snow. But the crop was nearly in. High and higher rose the cold blue cakes within the ice-house doors until they touched the rafter plate.

It was hard work. The horses pulled hard; the men swore hard, now and again, and worked harder than they swore. They were rough, simple men, crude and elemental like their labor. It was elemental work — filling a house with ice, three hundred-pound cakes of clean, clear ice, cut from the pond, skidded into the pungs, and hauled through the woods all white, and under a sky all gray, with softly-falling snow. They earned their penny; and I earned my penny, and I got it, though I asked only the wages of going on from dawn to dark, down the crystal hours of the day.

IV

SEED CATALOGUES

"THE new number of the 'Atlantic' came to-day," She said, stopping by the table. "It has your essay in it."

"Yes?" I replied, only half hearing.

"You have seen it, then?"

"No" — still absorbed in my reading.

"What is it you are so interested in?" she inquired, laying down the new magazine.

"A seed catalogue."

"More seed catalogues! Why, you read nothing else last night."

"But this is a new one," I replied, "and I declare I never saw turnips that could touch this improved strain here. I am going to plant a lot of them this year."

"How many seed catalogues have you had this spring?"

"Only six, so far."

"And you plant your earliest seeds — "

"In April, the middle of April, though I may be able to get my first peas in by the last of March. You see peas" — she was backing away — "this new Antarctic Pea — will stand a lot of cold; but beans — do come here, and look at these Improved Kentucky Wonder Pole Beans!" holding out the wonderfully lithographed page toward her. But she backed still farther away, and, putting her hands behind her, looked at me instead, and very solemnly.

I suppose every man comes to know that unaccountable expression in his wife's eyes soon or late: a sad, baffled expression, detached, remote, as of things seen darkly, or descried afar off; an expression which leaves you feeling that you *are* afar off, — discernible, but infinitely dwindled. Two minds with but a single thought — so you start; but soon she finds, or late, that as the heavens are high above the earth, so are some of your thoughts above her thoughts. She cannot follow. On the brink she stands and sees you, through the starry spaces, drift from her ken in your fleet of — seed catalogues.

I have never been able to explain to her the seed catalogue. She is as fond of vegetables as I, and neither of us cares much for turnips — nor for carrots, nor parsnips either, when it comes to that, our two hearts at the table beating happily as one. Born in the country, she inherited a love of the garden, but a feminine garden, the garden *parvus*, *minor*, *minimus* — so many cut-worms long, so many cut-worms wide. I love a garden of size, a garden that one cut-worm cannot sweep down upon in the night.

For years I have wanted to be a farmer, but there in the furrow ahead of me, like a bird on its nest, she has sat with her knitting; and when I speak of loving long rows to hoe, she smiles and says, "For the *boys* to hoe." Her unit of garden measure is a meal — so many beet seeds for a meal; so many meals for a row, with never two rows of anything, with hardly a full-length row of anything, and with all the rows of different lengths, as if gardening were a sort of geometry or a problem in arithmetic, figuring your vegetable with the meal for a common divisor — how many times it will go into all your rows without leaving a remainder!

Now I go by the seed catalogue, planting, not after the dish, as if my only vision were a garden peeled and in the pot, but after the Bush., Peck, Qt., Pt., Lb., Oz., Pkg., — so many pounds to the *acre*, instead of so many seeds to the meal.

And I have tried to show her that gardening is something of a risk, attended by chance, and no such exact science as dressmaking; that you cannot sow seeds as you can sew buttons; that the seed-man has no machine for putting sure-sprout-humps into each of his minute wares as the hook-and-eye-man has; that with all wisdom and understanding one could do no better than to buy (as I am careful to do) out of that catalogue whose title reads "Honest Seeds"; and that even the Sower in Holy Writ allowed somewhat for stony places and other inherent hazards of planting time.

But she follows only afar off, affirming the primary meaning of that parable to be plainly set forth in the context, while the secondary meaning pointeth out the folly of sowing seed anywhere save on good ground — which seemed to be only about one quarter of the area in the parable that was planted; and that anyhow, seed catalogues, especially those in colors, designed as they are to catch the simple-minded and unwary, need to be looked into by the post-office authorities and if possible kept from all city people, and from college professors in particular.

She is entirely right about the college professors. Her understanding is based upon years of observation and the patient cooking of uncounted pots of beans.

I confess to a weakness for gardening and no sense at all of proportion in vegetables. I can no more resist a seed catalogue than a toper can his cup. There is no game, no form of exercise, to compare for a moment in my mind with having a row of young growing things in a patch of mellow soil; no possession so sure, so worth while, so interesting as a piece of land. The smell of it, the feel of it, the call of it, intoxicate me. The rows are never long enough, nor the hours, nor the muscles strong enough either, when there is hoeing to do.

Why should she not take it as a solemn duty to save me from the hoe? Man is an immoderate animal, especially in the spring when the doors of his classroom are about to open for him into the wide and greening fields. There is only one place to live, — here in the hills of Hingham; and there is nothing better to do here or anywhere, than the hoeing, or the milking, or the feeding of the hens.

A professor in the small college of Slimsalaryville tells in a recent magazine of his long hair and no dress suit, and of his wife's doing the washing in order that they might have bread and the "Eugenic Review" on a salary of twelve hundred dollars a year. It is a sad story, in the midst of which he exclaims: "I may even get to the place where I can *spare time* (italics mine) to keep chickens or a cow, and that would help immensely; but I am so constituted that chickens or a cow would certainly cripple my work." How cripple it? Is n't it his work to *teach?* Far from it. "Let there be light," he says at the end of the essay, is his work, and he adds that he has been so busy with it that he is on the verge of a nervous break-down. Of course he is. Who would n't be with that job? And of course he has n't a constitution for chickens and a cow. But neither does he seem to have constitution enough for the light-giving either, being ready to collapse from his continuous shining.

But is n't this the case with many of us? Are n't we overworking — doing our own simple job of teaching and, besides that, taking upon ourselves the Lord's work of letting there be light?

I have come to the conclusion that there might not be any less light were the Lord allowed to do his own shining, and that probably there might be quite as good teaching if the teacher stuck humbly to his desk, and after school kept chickens and a cow. The egg-money and cream "would help immensely," even the Professor admits, the Professor's wife fully concurring no doubt.

Don't we all take ourselves a little seriously — we college professors and others? As if the Lord could not continue to look after his light, if we looked after our students! It is only in these last years that I have learned that I can go forth unto my work and to my labor until the evening, quitting then, and getting home in time to feed the chickens and milk the cow. I am a professional man, and I dwell in the midst of professional men, all of whom are inclined to help the Lord out by working after dark — all of whom are really in dire constitutional need of the early roosting chickens and the quiet, ruminating cow.

To walk humbly with the hens, that 's the thing — after the classes are dismissed and the office closed. To get out of the city, away from books, and theories, and students, and patients, and clients, and customers — back to real things, simple, restful, healthful things for body and soul, homely domestic things that lay eggs at 70 cents per dozen, and make butter at $2.25 the 5-pound box! As for me, this does "help immensely," affording me all necessary hair-cuts (I don't want the "Eugenic Review"), and allowing Her to send the family washing (except the flannels) to the laundry.

Instead of crippling normal man's normal work, country living (chickens and a cow) will prevent his work from crippling him — keeping him a little from his students and thus saving him from too much teaching; keeping him from reading the "Eugenic Review" and thus saving him from too much learning; curing him, in short, of his "constitution" that is bound to come to some sort of a collapse unless rested and saved by chickens and a cow.

"By not too many chickens," she would add; and there is no one to match her with a chicken — fried, stewed, or turned into pie.

The hens are no longer mine, the boys having taken them over; but the gardening I can't give up, nor the seed catalogues.

The one in my hands was exceptionally radiant, and exceptionally full of Novelties and Specialties for the New Year, among them being an extraordinary new pole bean — an Improved Kentucky Wonder. She had backed away, as I have said, and instead of looking at the page of beans, looked solemnly at me; then with something sorrowful, something somewhat Sunday-like in her voice, an echo, I presume, of lessons in the Catechism, she asked me —

"Who makes you plant beans?"

"My dear," I began, "I —"

"How many meals of pole beans did we eat last summer?"

"I — don't — re — "

"Three — just three," she answered. "And I think you must remember how many of that row of poles we picked?"

"Why, yes, I — "

"Three — just three out of thirty poles! Now, do you think you remember how many bushels of those beans went utterly unpicked?"

I was visibly weakening by this time.

"Three — do you think?"

"Multiply that three by three-times-three! And now tell me — "

But this was too much.

"My dear," I protested, "I recollect exactly. It was — "

"No, I don't believe you do. I cannot trust you at all with beans. But I should like to know why you plant ten or twelve kinds of beans when the *only* kind we like are limas!"

"Why — the — catalogue advises — "

"Yes, the catalogue advises — "

"You don't seem to understand, my dear, that — "

"Now, *why* don't I understand?"

I paused. This is always a hard question, and peculiarly hard as the end of a series, and on a topic as difficult as beans. I don't know beans. There is little or nothing about beans in the history of philosophy or in poetry. Thoreau says that when he was hoeing his beans it was not beans that he hoed nor he that hoed beans — which was the only saying that came to mind at the moment, and under the circumstances did not seem to help me much.

"Well," I replied, fumbling among my stock of ready-made reasons, "I — really — don't — know exactly why you don't understand. Indeed, I really don't know — that *I* exactly understand. *Everything* is full of things that even I can't understand — how to explain my tendency to plant all kinds of beans, for instance; or my 'weakness,' as you call it, for seed catalogues; or — "

She opened her magazine, and I hastened to get the stool for her feet. As I adjusted the light for her she said: —

"Let me remind you that this is the night of the annual banquet of your Swampatalk Club; you don't intend to forego that famous roast beef for the seed catalogues?"

"I did n't intend to, but I must say that literature like this is enough to make a man a vegetarian. Look at that page for an old-fashioned New England Boiled Dinner! Such carrots. Really *they* look good enough to eat. I think I 'll plant some of those improved carrots; and some of these parsnips; and some — "

"You had better go get ready," she said, "and please put that big stick on the fire for me," drawing the lamp toward her, as she spoke, so that all of its green-shaded light fell over her — over the silver in her hair, with its red rose; over the pink and lacy thing that wrapped her from her sweet throat to the silver stars on her slippers.

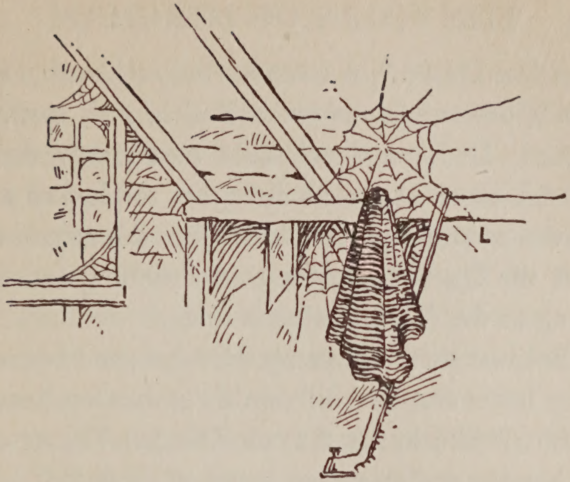
"I 'm not going to that Club!" I said. "I have talked myself for three hours to-day, attended two conferences, and listened to one address. There were three different societies for the general improving of things that met at the University halls to-day with big speakers from the ends of the earth. To-morrow night I address The First Century Club in the city after a dinner with the New England Teachers of English Monthly Luncheon Club — and I would like to know what we came out here in the woods for, anyhow?"

"If you are going — " She was speaking calmly.

"Going where?" I replied, picking up the seed catalogues to make room for myself on the couch. "*Please* look at this pumpkin! Think of what a jack-o'-lantern it would make for the boys! I am going to plant — "

"You 'll be cold," she said, rising and drawing a steamer rug up over me; then laying the open magazine across my shoulders while giving the pillow a motherly pull, she added, with a sigh of contentment: —

"Perhaps, if it had n't been for me, you might have been a great success with pumpkins or pigs — I don't know."



V

THE DUSTLESS–DUSTER

THERE are beaters, brooms and Bissell's Sweepers; there are dry-mops, turkey-wings, whisks, and vacuum-cleaners; there are — but no matter. Whatever other things there are, and however many of them in the closet, the whole dust-raising kit is incomplete without the Dustless-Duster.

For the Dustless-Duster is final, absolute. What can be added to, or taken away from, a

Dustless-Duster? A broom is only a broom, even a new broom. Its sphere is limited; its work is partial. Dampened and held persistently down by the most expert of sweepers, the broom still leaves something for the Dustless-Duster to do. But the Dustless-Duster leaves nothing for anything to do. The dusting is done.

Because there are many who dust, and because they have searched in vain for a dustless-duster, I should like to say that the Dustless-Duster can be bought at department stores, at those that have a full line of departments — at any department store, in fact; for the Dustless-Duster department is the largest of all the departments, whatever the store. Ask for it of your jeweler, grocer, milliner. Ask for "The Ideal," "The Universal," "The Indispensable," of any man with anything to sell or preach or teach, and you shall have it — the perfect thing which you have spent life looking for; which you have thought so often to have, but found as often that you had not. You shall have it. I have it. One hangs, rather, in the kitchen on the clothes-dryer.

And one (more than one) hangs in the kitchen closet, and in the cellar, and in the attic. I have often brought it home, for my search has been diligent since a certain day, years ago, — a "Commencement Day" at the Institute.

I had never attended a Commencement exercise before; I had never been in an opera house before; and the painted light through the roof of windows high overhead, the strains of the orchestra from far below me, the banks of broad-leaved palms, the colors, the odors, the confusion of flowers and white frocks, were strangely thrilling. Nothing had ever happened to me in the woods like this: the exaltation, the depression, the thrill of joy, the throb of pain, the awakening, the wonder, the purpose, and the longing! It was all a dream — all but the form and the face of one girl graduate, and the title of her essay, "The Real and the Ideal."

I do not know what large and lofty sentiments she uttered; I only remember the way she looked them. I did not hear the words she read; but I still feel the absolute fitness of her theme — how real her simple white frock, her radiant face, her dark hair! And how ideal!

I had seen perfection. Here was the absolute, the final, the ideal, the indispensable! And I was fourteen! Now I am past forty; and upon the kitchen clothes-dryer hangs the Dustless-Duster.

No, I have not lost the vision. The daughter of that girl, the image of her mother, slipped into my classroom the other day. Nor have I faltered in the quest. The search goes on, and must go on; for however often I get it, only to cast it aside, the indispensable, the ultimate, must continue to be indispensable and ultimate, until, some day —

What matters how many times I have had it, to discover every time that it is only a piece of cheesecloth, ordinary cheesecloth, dyed black and stamped with red letters? The search must go on, notwithstanding the clutter in the kitchen closet. The cellar is crowded with Dustless-Dusters, too; the garret is stuffed with them. There is little else besides them anywhere in the house. And this was an empty house when I moved into it, a few years ago.

As I moved in, an old man moved out, back to the city whence a few years before he had come; and he took back with him twelve two-horse wagon-loads of Dustless-Dusters. He had spent a long life collecting them, and now, having gathered all there were in the country, he was going back to the city, in a last pathetic, a last heroic, effort to find the one Dustless-Duster more.

It was the old man's twelve two-horse loads that were pathetic. There were many sorts of things in those twelve loads, of many lands, of many dates, but all of one stamp. The mark was sometimes hard to find, corroded sometimes nearly past deciphering, yet never quite gone. The red letters were indelible on every piece, from the gross of antique candle-moulds (against the kerosene's giving out) to an ancient coffin-plate, far oxidized, and engraved "Jones," which, the old man said, as he pried it off the side of the barn, "might come in handy any day."

The old man has since died and been laid to rest. Upon his coffin was set a new silver plate, engraved simply and truthfully, "Brown."

We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain, says Holy Writ, that we can carry nothing out. But it is also certain that we shall attempt to carry out, or try to find as soon as we are out, a Dustless-Duster. For we did bring something with us into this world, losing it temporarily, to be forever losing and finding it; and when we go into another world, will it not be to carry the thing with us there, or to continue there our eternal search for it? We are not so certain of carrying nothing out of this world, but we are certain of leaving many things behind.

Among those that I shall leave behind me is The Perfect Automatic Carpet-Layer. But I did not buy that. She did. It was one of the first of our perfections.

We have more now. I knew as I entered the house that night that something had happened; that the hope of the early dawn had died, for some cause, with the dusk. The trouble showed in her eyes: mingled doubt, chagrin, self-accusation, self-defense, defeat — familiar symptoms. She had seen something, something perfect, and had bought it.

I knew the look well, and the feelings all too well, and said nothing. For suppose I had been at home that day and she had been in town? Still, on my trip into town that morning I ran the risk of meeting the man who sold me "The Magic Stropless Razor Salve." No, not that man! I shall never meet him again, for vengeance is mine, saith the *Lord.* But suppose I had met him? And suppose he had had some other salve, *Safety* Razor Salve this time to sell?

It is for young men to see visions and for old men to dream dreams; but it is for no man or woman to buy one.

She had seen a vision, and had bought it — "The Perfect Automatic Carpet-Layer."

I kept silence, as I say, which is often a thoughtful thing to do.

"Are you ill?" she ventured, handing me my tea.

"No."

"Tired?"

"No."

"I hope you are not very tired, for the Parsonage Committee brought the new carpet this afternoon, and I have started to put it down. I thought we would finish it this evening. It won't be any work at all for you, for I — I — bought you one of these to-day to put it down with," — pushing an illustrated circular across the table toward me.

Any Child Can Use It

THE PERFECT AUTOMATIC CARPET-LAYER

No more carpet-laying bills. Do your own laying. No wrinkles. No crowded corners. No sore knees. No pounded fingers. No broken backs. Stand up and lay your carpet with the Perfect Automatic. Easy as sweeping. Smooth as putting paper on the wall. You hold the handle, and the Perfect Automatic does the rest. Patent Applied For. Price —

— but it was not the price! It was the tool — a weird hybrid tool, part gun, part rake, part catapult, part curry-comb, fit apparently for almost any purpose, from the business of blunderbuss to the office of an apple-picker. Its handle, which any child could hold, was somewhat shorter and thicker than a hoe-handle, and had a slotted tin barrel, a sort of intestine, on its ventral side along its entire length. Down this intestine, their points sticking through the slot, moved the tacks in single file to a spring-hammer close to the floor. This hammer was operated by a lever or tongue at the head of the handle, the connection between the hammer at the distal end and the lever at the proximal end being effected by means of a steel-wire spinal cord down the dorsal side of the handle. Over the fist of a hammer spread a jaw of sharp teeth to take hold of the carpet. The thing could not talk; but it could do almost anything else, so fearfully and wonderfully was it made.

As for laying carpets with it, any child could do that. But we did n't have any children then, and I had quite outgrown my childhood. I tried to be a boy again just for that night. I grasped the handle of the Perfect Automatic, stretched with our united strength, and pushed down on the lever. The spring-hammer drew back, a little trap or mouth at the end of the slotted tin barrel opened for the tack, the tack jumped out, turned over, landed point downward upon the right spot in the carpet, the crouching hammer sprang, and —

And then I lifted up the Perfect Automatic to see if the tack went in, — a simple act that any child could do, but which took automatically and perfectly all the stretch out of the carpet; for the hammer did not hit the tack; the tack really did not get through the trap; the trap did not open the slot; the slot — but no matter. We have no carpets now. The Perfect Automatic stands in the garret with all its original varnish on. At its feet sits a half-used can of "Beesene, The Prince of Floor Pastes."

We have only hard-wood floors now, which we treated, upon the strength of the label, with this Prince of Pastes, "Beesene" — "guaranteed not to show wear or dirt or to grow gritty; waterproof, gravel-proof. No rug will ruck on it, no slipper stick to it. Needs no weighted brush. Self-shining. The only perfect Floor Wax known. One box will do all the floors you have."

Indeed, half a box did all the floors we have. No slipper would stick to the paste, but the paste would stick to the slipper; and the greasy Prince did in spots all the floors we have: the laundry floor, the attic floor, and the very boards of the vegetable cellar.

I am young yet. I have not had time to collect my twelve two-horse loads. But I am getting them fast.

Only the other day a tall lean man came to the side door, asking after my four boys by name, and inquiring when my new book would be off the stocks, and, incidentally, showing me a patent-applied-for device called "The Fat Man's Friend."

"The Friend" was a steel-wire hoop, shaped and jointed like a pair of calipers, but knobbed at its points with little metal balls. The instrument was made to open and spring closed about the Fat Man's neck, and to hold, by means of a clasp on each side, a napkin, or bib, spread securely over the Fat Man's bosom.

"Ideal thing, now, is n't it?" said the agent, demonstrating with his handkerchief.

"Why — yes" — I hesitated — "for a fat man, perhaps."

"Just so," he replied, running me over rapidly with a professional eye; "but you know, Professor, that when a man 's forty, or thereabouts, it 's the nature of him to stouten. Once past forty he 's liable to pick up any day. And when he starts, you know as well as I, Professor, when he starts there 's nothing fattens faster than a man of forty. You ought to have one of these 'Friends' on hand."

"But fat does n't run in my family," I protested, my helpless, single-handed condition being plainly manifest in my tone.

"No matter," he rejoined, "look at me! Six feet three, and thin as a lath. I 'm what you might call a walking skeleton, ready to disjoint, as the poet says, and eat all my meals in fear, which I would do if 't wa'n't for this little 'Friend.' I can't eat without it. I miss it more when I am eatin' than I miss the victuals. I carry one with me all the time. Awful handy little thing. Now — "

"But — " I put in.

"Certainly," he continued, with the smoothest-running motor I ever heard, "but here 's the point of the whole matter, as you might say. *This* thing is up to date, Professor. Now, the old-fashioned way of tying a knot in the corner of your napkin and anchoring it under your Adam's apple — *that 's* gone by. Also the stringed bib and safety-pin. Both those devices were crude — but necessary, of course, Professor — and inconvenient, and that old-fashioned knot really dangerous; for the knot, pressing against the Adam's apple, or the apple, as you might say, trying to swallow the knot — well, if there is n't less apoplexy and strangulation when this little Friend finds universal application, then I 'm no Prophet, as the Good Book says."

"But you see — " I broke in.

"I do, Professor. It 's right here. I understand your objection. But it is purely verbal and academic, Professor. You are troubled concerning the name of this indispensable article. But you know, as well as I — even better with your education, Professor — that there 's nothing, absolutely nothing in a name. 'What 's in a name?' the poet says. And I 'll agree with you — though, of course, it 's confidential — that 'The Fat Man's Friend' is, as you literary folks would say, more or less of a *nom de plume*. Is n't it? Besides, — if you 'll allow me the language, Professor, — it 's too delimiting, restricting, prejudicing. Sets a lean man against it. But between us, Professor, they 're going to change the name of the next batch. They 're — "

"Indeed!" I exclaimed; "what 's the next batch going to be?"

"Oh, just the same — fifteen cents each — two for a quarter. You could n't tell them apart. You might just as well have one of these, and run no chances getting one of the next lot. They 'll be precisely the same; only, you see, they 're going to name the next ones 'Every Bosom's Friend,' to fit lean and fat, and without distinction of sex. Ideal thing now, is n't it? Yes, that 's right

— fifteen cents — two for twenty-five, Professor? — don't you want another for your wife?"

No, I did not want another for her. But if *she* had been at home, and I had been away, who knows but that all six of us had come off with a "Friend" apiece? They were a bargain by the half-dozen.

A bargain? Did anybody ever get a bargain — something worth more than he paid? Well — — you shall, when you bring home a Dustless-Duster.

And who has not brought it home! Or who is not about to bring it home! Not all the years that I have searched, not all the loads that I have collected, count against the conviction that at last I have it — the perfect thing — until I *reach* home. But with several of my perfections I have never yet reached home, or I am waiting an opportune season to give them to my wife. I have been disappointed; but let no one try to tell me that there is no such thing as Perfection. Is not the desire for it the breath of my being? Is not the search for it the end of my existence? Is not the belief that at last I possess it — in myself, my children, my breed of hens, my religious creed, my political party — is not this conviction, I say, all there is of existence?

It is very easy to see that perfection is not in any of the other political parties. During a political campaign, not long since, I wrote to a friend in New Jersey, —

"Now, whatever your particular, personal brand of political faith, it is clearly your moral duty to vote this time the Democratic ticket."

Whereupon (and he is a thoughtful, God-fearing man, too) he wrote back, —

"As I belong to the only party of real reform, I shall stick to it this year, as I always have, and vote the straight ticket."

Is there a serener faith than this human faith in perfection? A surer, more unshakable belief than this human belief in the present possession of it?

There is only one thing deeper in the heart of man than his desire for completeness, and that is his conviction of being about to attain unto it. He dreams of completeness by night; works for completeness by day; buys it of every agent who comes along; votes for it at every election; accepts it with every sermon; and finds it —

momentarily — every time he finds himself. The desire for it is the sweet spring of all his satisfactions; the possession of it the bitter fountain of many of his woes.

Apply the conviction anywhere, to anything — creeds, wives, hens — and see how it works out.

As to *hens :* —

There are many breeds of fairly good hens, and I have tried as many breeds as I have had years of keeping hens, but not until the poultry show, last winter, did I come upon the perfect hen. I had been working toward her through the Bantams, Brahmas, and Leghorns, to the Plymouth Rocks. I had tried the White and the Barred Plymouth Rocks, but they were not the hen. Last winter I came upon the originator of the Buff Plymouth Rocks — and here she was! I shall breed nothing henceforth but Buff Plymouth Rocks.

In the Buff Rock we have a bird of ideal size, neither too large nor too small, weighing about three pounds more than the undersized Leghorn, and about three pounds less than the oversized Brahma; we have a bird of ideal color, too — a single, soft, even tone, and no such barnyard daub as the Rhode Island Red; not crow-colored, either, like the Minorca; nor liable to all the dirt of the White Plymouth Rocks. Being a beautiful and uniform buff, this perfect Plymouth Rock is easily bred true to color, as the vari-colored fowls are not.

Moreover, the Buff Rock is a layer, is *the* layer, maturing as she does about four weeks later than the Rhode Island Reds, and so escaping that fatal early fall laying with its attendant moult and eggless interim until March! On the other hand, the Buff Rock matures about a month earlier than the logy, slow-growing breeds, and so gets a good start before the cold and eggless weather comes.

And such an egg! There are white eggs and brown eggs, large and small eggs, but only one ideal egg — the Buff Rock's. It is of a soft lovely brown, yet whitish enough for a New York market, but brown enough, however, to meet the exquisite taste of the Boston trade. In fact it is neither white nor brown, but rather a delicate blend of the two — a new tone, indeed, a bloom rather, that I must call fresh-laid lavender.

So, at least, I am told. My pullets are not yet laying, having had a very late start last spring.

But the real question, speaking professionally, with any breed of fowls is a market question: How do they dress? How do they eat?

If the Buff Plymouth Rock is an ideal bird in her feathers, she is even more so plucked. All white-feathered fowl, in spite of yellow legs, look cadaverous when picked. All dark-feathered fowl, with their tendency to green legs and black pinfeathers, look spotted, long dead, and unsavory. But the Buff Rock, a melody in color, shows that consonance, that consentaneousness, of flesh to feather that makes the plucked fowl to the feathered fowl what high noon is to the faint and far-off dawn — a glow of golden legs and golden neck, mellow, melting as butter, and all the more so with every unpicked pinfeather.

Can there be any doubt of the existence of hen-perfection? Any question of my having attained unto it — with the maturing of this new breed of hens?

For all spiritual purposes, that is, for all satisfactions, the ideal hen is the pullet — the Buff Plymouth Rock pullet.

Just so the ideal wife. If we could only keep them pullets!

The trouble we husbands have with our wives begins with our marrying them. There is seldom any trouble with them before. Our belief in feminine perfection is as profound and as eternal as youth. And the perfection is just as real as the faith. Youth is always bringing the bride home —to hang her on the kitchen clothes-dryer. She turns out to be ordinary cheese-cloth, dyed a more or less fast black — this perfection that he had stamped in letters of indelible red!

The race learns nothing. I learn, but not my children after me. They learn only after themselves. Already I hear my boys saying that *their* wives —! And the oldest of these boys has just turned fourteen!

Fourteen! the trouble all began at fourteen. No, the trouble began with Adam, though Eve has been responsible for much of it since. Adam had all that a man should have wanted in his perfect Garden. Nevertheless he wanted Eve. Eve in turn had Adam, a perfect man! but she wanted something more — if only the apple tree in the middle of the Garden. And we all of us were there in that Garden — with Adam thinking he was getting perfection in Eve; with Eve incapable of appreciating perfection in Adam. The trouble is human.

> "Flounder, flounder in the sea,
> Prythee quickly come to me!
> For my wife, Dame Isabel,
> Wants strange things I scarce dare tell."

"And what does she want *now?*" asks the flounder.

"Oh, she wants to *vote* now," says the fisherman.

"Go home, and you shall find her with the ballot," sighs the flounder. "But has n't she Dustless-Dusters enough already?"

It would seem so. But once having got Adam, who can blame her for wanting an apple tree besides, or the ballot?

'T is no use to forbid her. Yes, she has you, but — but Eve had Adam, too, another perfect man! Don't forbid her, for she will have it anyhow. It may not turn out to be all that she thinks it is. But did you turn out to be all that she thought you were? She will have a bite of this new apple if she has to disobey, and die for it, because such disobedience and death are in answer to a higher command, and to a larger life from within. Eve's discovery that Adam was cheese-cloth, and her reaching out for something better, did not, as Satan promised, make us as God; but it did make us different from all the other animals in the Garden, placing us even above the angels, — so far above, as to bring us, apparently, by a new and divine descent, into Eden.

The hope of the race is in Eve, — in her making the best she can of Adam; in her clear understanding of his lame logic, — that her *im*perfections added to his perfections make the perfect Perfection; and in her reaching out beyond Adam for something more — for the ballot now.

If there is growth, if there is hope, if there is continuance, if there is immortality for the race and for the soul, it is to be found in this sure faith in the Ultimate, the Perfect, in this certain disappointment every time we think we have it; and in this abiding conviction that we are about to bring it home. But let a man settle down on perfection as a present possession, and that man is as good as dead already — even religiously dead, if he has possession of a perfect Salvation.

Now, "Sister Smith" claimed to possess Perfection — a perfect infallible book of revelations in her King James Version of the Scriptures, and she claimed to have lived by it, too, for eighty years. I was fresh from the theological school, and this was my first "charge." This was my first meal, too, in this new charge, at the home of one of the official brethren, with whom Sister Smith lived.

There was an ominous silence at the table for which I could hardly account — unless it had to do with the one empty chair. Then Sister Smith appeared and took the chair. The silence deepened. Then Sister Smith began to speak and everybody stopped eating. Brother Jones laid down his knife, Sister Jones dropped her hands into her lap until the thing should be over. Leaning far forward toward me across the table, her steady gray eyes boring through me, her long bony finger pointing beyond me into eternity, Sister Smith began with spaced and measured words: —

"My young Brother — what — do — you — think — of — Jonah?"

I reached for a doughnut, broke it, slowly, dipped it up and down in the cup of mustard and tried for time. Not a soul stirred. Not a word or sound broke the tense silence about the operating-table.

"What — do — you — think — of — Jonah?"

"Well, Sister Smith, I —"

"Never mind. Don't commit yourself. You need n't tell me what you think of Jonah. You — are — too — young — to — know — what — you — think — of — Jonah. But I will tell you what *I* think of Jonah: if the Scriptures had said that Jonah swallowed the whale, it would be just as easy to believe as it is that the whale swallowed Jonah."

"So it would, Sister Smith," I answered weakly, "just as easy."

"And now, my young Brother, you preach the Scriptures — the old genuine inspired Authorized Version, word for word, just as God spoke it!"

Sister Smith has gone to Heaven, but in spite of her theology. Dear old soul, she sent me many a loaf of her salt-rising bread after that, for she had as warm a heart as ever beat its brave way past eighty.

But she had neither a perfect Book, nor a perfect Creed, nor a perfect Salvation. She did not need them; nor could she have used them; for they would have posited a divine command to be perfect — a too difficult accomplishment for any of us, even for Sister Smith.

There is no such divine command laid upon us; but only such a divinely human need springing up within us, and reaching out for everything, in its deep desire, from dust-cloths dyed black to creeds of every color.

This is a life of imperfections, a world made of cheese-cloth, merely dyed black, and stamped in red letters — The Dustless-Duster. Yet a cheese-cloth world so dyed and stamped is better than a cloth-of-gold world, for the cloth-of-gold you would not want to dye nor to stamp with burning letters.

We have never found it, — this perfect thing, — and perhaps we never shall. But the desire, the search, the faith, must not fail us, as at times they seem to do. At times the very tides of the ocean seem to fail, — when the currents cease to run. Yet when they are at slack here, they are at flood on the other side of the world, turning already to pour back —

"... lo, out of his plenty the sea
Pours fast; full soon the time of the flood-tide shall be — "

The faith cannot fail us — for long. Full soon the ebb-tide turns,

> "And Belief overmasters doubt, and I know that I know"

that there is perfection; that the desire for it is the breath of life; that the search for it is the hope of immortality.

But I know only in part. I see through a glass darkly, and I may be no nearer it now than when I started, yet the search has carried me far from that start. And if I never arrive, then, at least, I shall keep going on, which, in itself may be the thing — the Perfect Thing that I am seeking.

VI

SPRING PLOUGHING

SEE–SAW, Margery Daw! Sold her bed and lay upon straw" — the very worst thing, I used to think, that ever happened in Mother Goose. I might steal a pig, perhaps, like Tom the Piper's Son, but never would I do such a thing as Margery did; the dreadful picture of her nose and of that bottle in her hand made me sure of that. And yet — snore on, Margery! — I sold my *plough* and bought an automobile! As if an automobile would carry me

> "To the island-valley of Avilion,"

where I should no longer need the touch of the soil and the slow simple task to heal me of my grievous wound!

Speed, distance, change — are these the cure for that old hurt we call living, the long dull ache of winter, the throbbing bitter-sweet pain of spring? We seek for something different, something not different but faster and still faster, to fill our eyes with flying, our ears with rushing, our skins with scurrying, our diaphragms, which are our souls, with the thrill of curves, and straight stretches, of lifts, and drops, and sudden halts — as of elevators, merry-go-rounds, chutes, scenic railways, aeroplanes, and heavy low-hung cars.

To go — up or down, or straight away — anyway, but round and round, and slowly — as if one could speed away from being, or ever travel beyond one's self! How pathetic to sell all that one has and buy an automobile! to shift one's grip from the handles of life to the wheel of change! to forsake the furrow for the highway, the rooted soil for the flying dust, the here for the there; imagining that somehow a car is more than a plough, that going is the last word in living — demountable rims and non-skid tires, the great gift of the God Mechanic, being the 1916 model of the wings of the soul!

But women must weep in spite of modern mechanics, and men must plough. Petroleum, with all of its by-products, cannot be served for bread. I have tried many substitutes for ploughing; and as for the automobile, I have driven that thousands of miles, driven it almost daily, summer and winter; but let the blackbirds return, let the chickweed start in the garden, then the very stones of the walls cry out—"Plough! plough!"

It is not the stones I hear, but the entombed voices of earlier primitive selves far back in my dim past; those, and the call of the boy I was yesterday, whose landside toes still turn in, perhaps, from walking in the furrow. When that call comes, no

> "Towered cities please us then
> And the busy hum of men,"

or of automobiles. I must plough. It is the April wind that wakes the call—

> "Zephirus eek, with his sweetë breeth" —

and many hearing it long to "goon on pilgrimages," or to the Maine woods to fish, or, waiting until the 19th, to leave Boston by boat and go up and down the shore to see how fared their summer cottages during the winter storms; some even imagine they have malaria and long for bitters — as many men as many minds when

> "The time of the singing of birds is come
> And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."

But as for me it is neither bitters, nor cottages, nor trout, nor

> "ferne halwes couth in sondry landës"

that I long for: but simply for the soil, for the warming, stirring earth, for my mother. It is back to her breast I would go, back to the wide sweet fields, to the slow-moving team and the lines about my shoulder, to the even furrow rolling from the mould-board, to the taste of the soil, the sight of the sky, the sound of the robins and bluebirds and blackbirds, and the ringing notes of Highhole over the sunny fields.

I hold the plough as my only hold upon the earth, and as I follow through the fresh and fragrant furrow I am planted with every footstep, growing, budding, blooming into a spirit of the spring. I can catch the blackbirds ploughing, I can turn under with my furrow the laughter of the flowers, the very joy of the skies. But if I so much as turn in my tracks, the blackbirds scatter; if I shout, Highhole is silent; if I chase the breeze, it runs away; I might climb into the humming maples, might fill my hands with arbutus and bloodroot, might run and laugh aloud with the light; as if with feet I could overtake it, could catch it in my hands, and in my heart could hold it all — this living earth, shining sky, flowers, buds, voices, colors, odors — this spring!

But I can plough — while the blackbirds come close behind me in the furrow; and I can be the spring.

I could plough, I mean, when I had a plough. But I sold it for five dollars and bought a second-hand automobile for fifteen hundred — as everybody else has. So now I do as everybody else does, — borrow my neighbor's plough, or still worse, get my neighbor to do my ploughing, being still blessed with a neighbor so steadfast and simple as to possess a plough. But I must plough or my children's children will never live to have children, — they will have motor cars instead. The man who pulls down his barns and builds a garage is not planning for posterity. But perhaps it does not matter; for while we are purring cityward over the sleek and tarry roads, big hairy Finns are following the plough round and round our ancestral fields, planting children in the furrows, so that there shall be some one here when we have motored off to possess the land.

I see no way but to keep the automobile and buy another plough, not for my children's sake any more than for my own. There was an old man living in this house when I bought it who moved back into the city and took with him, among other things, a big grindstone and two long-handled hayforks — for crutches, did he think? and to keep a cutting edge on the scythe of his spirit as he mowed the cobblestones? When I am old and my children compel me to move back near the asylums and hospitals, I shall carry into the city with me a plough; and I shall pray the police to let me go every springtime to the Garden or the Common and there turn a few furrows as one whom still his mother comforteth.

It is only a few furrows that I now turn. A half-day and it is all over, all the land ploughed that I own,—all that the Lord intended should be tilled. A half-day — but every fallow field and patch of stubble within me has been turned up in that time, given over for the rain and sunshine to mellow and put into tender tilth.

No other labor, no other contact with the earth is like ploughing. You may play upon it, travel over it, delve into it, build your house down on it; but when you strike into the bosom of the fields with your ploughshare, wounding and healing as your feet follow deep in the long fresh cut, you feel the throbbing of the heart of life through the oaken handles as you never felt it before; you are conscious of a closer union, — dust with dust, — of a more mystical union, — spirit with spirit, — than any other approach, work, or rite, or ceremony, can give you. You move, but your feet seem to reach through and beyond the furrow like the roots of the oak tree; sun and air and soil are yours as if the blood in your veins were the flow of all sweet saps, oak and maple and willow, and your breath their bloom of green and garnet and gold.

And so, until I get a new plough and a horse to pull it, I shall hire my neighbor — hire him to drive the horses, while I hold in the plough!

This is what I have come to! *Hiring* another to skim my cream and share it! Let me handle both team and plough, a plough that guides itself, and a deep rich piece of bottom land, and a furrow, — a long straight furrow that curls and crests like a narrow wave and breaks evenly into the trough of the wave before.

But even with the hired plough, I am taking part in the making of spring; and more: I am planting me again as a tree, a bush, a mat of chickweed, — lowly, tiny, starry-flowered chickweed, — in the earth, whence, so long ago it sometimes seems, I was pulled up.

But the ploughing does more — more than root me as a weed. Ploughing is walking not by sight. A man believes, trusts, worships something he cannot see when he ploughs. It is an act of faith. In all time men have known and *feared* God; but there must have been a new and higher consciousness when they began to plough. They hunted and feared God and remained savage; they ploughed, trusted, and loved God — and became civilized.

Nothing more primitive than the plough have we brought with us out of our civilized past. In the furrow was civilization cradled, and there, if anywhere, shall it be interred.

You go forth unto your day's work, if you have land enough, until the Lord's appointed close; then homeward plod your weary way, leaving the world to the poets. Not yours

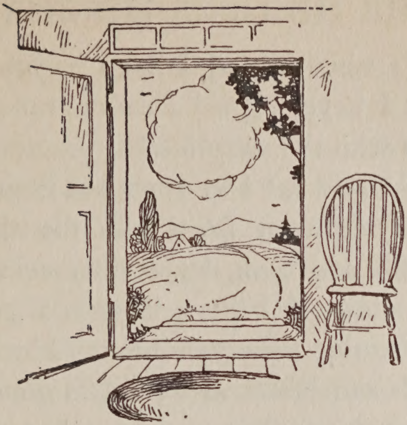
"The hairy gown, the mossy cell."

You have no need of them.

What more

"Of every star that Heaven doth shew
And every hearb that sips the dew"

can the poet spell than all day long you have *felt?* Has ever poet handled more of life than you? Has he ever gone deeper than the bottom of your furrow, or asked any larger faith than you of your field? Has he ever found anything sweeter or more satisfying than the wholesome toilsome round of the plough?



VII

MERE BEANS

"God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it; he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited." — Isaiah.

A FARMER," said my neighbor, Joel Moore, with considerable finality, "has got to get all he can, and keep all he gets, or die."

"Yes," I replied with a fine platitude; "but he's got to give if he's going to get."

"Just so," he answered, his eye a-glitter with wrath as it traveled the trail of the fox across the dooryard; "just so, and I'll go halves with the soil; but I never signed a lease to run this farm on shares with the varmints."

"Well," said I, "I've come out from the city to run my farm on shares with the whole universe — fox and hawk, dry weather and wet, summer and winter. I believe there is a great deal more to farming than mere beans. I'm going to raise birds and beasts as well. I'm going to cultivate everything, from my stone-piles up to the stars."

He looked me over. I had not been long out from the city. Then he said, thinking doubtless of my stone-piles: —

"Professor, you've bought a mighty rich piece of land. And it's just as you say; there's more to farmin' than beans. But, as I see it, beans are beans any way you cook 'em; and I think, if I was you, I would hang on a while yet to my talkin' job in the city."

It was sound advice. I have a rich farm. I have raised beans that were beans, and I have raised birds, besides, and beasts,— a perfectly enormous crop of woodchucks; I have cultivated everything up to the stars; but I find it necessary to hang on a while yet to my talkin' job in the city.

Nevertheless, Joel is fundamentally wrong about the beans, for beans are not necessarily beans any way you cook them, nor are beans mere beans any way you grow them — not if I remember Thoreau and my extensive ministerial experience with bean suppers.

As for growing mere beans — listen to Thoreau. He is out in his patch at Walden.

"When my hoe tinkled against the stones, that music echoed to the woods and the sky, and was an accompaniment to my labor which yielded an instant and immeasurable crop. It was no longer beans that I hoed, nor I that hoed beans."

Who was it, do you suppose, that hoed? And, if not beans, what was it that he hoed? Well, poems for one thing, prose poems. If there is a more delightful chapter in American literature than that one in Walden on the bean-patch, I don't know which chapter it is. That patch was made to yield more than beans. The very stones were made to tinkle till their music sounded on the sky.

"As *I* see it, beans are beans," said Joel. And so they are, as he sees them.

Is not the commonplaceness, the humdrumness, the dead-levelness, of life largely a matter of individual vision, "as I see it"?

Take farm life, for instance, and how it is typified in my neighbor! how it is epitomized, too, and really explained in his "beans are beans"! He raises beans; she cooks beans; they eat beans. Life is pretty much all beans. If "beans are beans," why, how much more is life?

He runs his farm on halves with the soil, and there the sharing stops, and consequently there the returns stop. He gives to the soil and the soil gives back, thirty, sixty, an hundredfold. What if he should give to the skies as well? — to the wild life that dwells with him on his land? — to the wild flowers that bank his meadow brook? — to the trees that cover his pasture slopes? Would they, like the soil, give anything back?

Off against the sky to the south a succession of his rounded slopes shoulder their way from the woods out to where the road and the brook wind through. They cannot be tilled; the soil is too scant and gravelly; but they are lovely in their gentle forms, and still lovelier in their clumps of mingled cedars and gray birches, scattered dark and sharply pointed on the blue of the sky, and diffuse, and soft, and gleaming white against the hillside's green. I cannot help seeing them from my windows, cannot help lingering over them — could not, rather; for recently my neighbor (and there never was a better neighbor) sent a man over those hills with an axe, and piled the birches into cords of snowy firewood.

It was done. I could not help it, but in my grief I went over and spoke to him about it. He was sorry, and explained the case by saying, —

"Well, if there 's one kind of tree I hate more than another, it 's a gray birch."

We certainly need a rural uplift. We need an urban uplift, too, no doubt, for I suppose "beans are beans" in Boston, just as they are here in Hingham. But it does seem the more astonishing that in the country, where the very environment is poetry, where companionship with living things is constant, where even the labor of one's hands is coöperation with the divine forces of nature — the more astonishing, I say, that under these conditions life should so often be but bare existence, mere beans.

There are many causes for this, one of them being an unwillingness to share largely with the whole of nature. "I 'll go halves with the soil," said my neighbor; but he did not sign a lease to run his farm on shares with the "varmints," the fox, which stole his fine rooster, on this particular occasion.

But such a contract is absolutely necessary if one is to get out of farm life — out of any life — its flowers and fragrance, as well as its pods and beans. And, first, one must be convinced, must acknowledge to one's self, that the flower and fragrance are needed in life, are as useful as pods and beans. A row of sweet peas is as necessary on the farm as a patch of the best wrinkled variety in the garden.

But to come back to the fox.

Now, I have lived long enough, and I have had that fox steal roosters enough, to understand, even feel, my neighbor's wrath perfectly. I fully sympathize with him. What, then, you ask, of my sympathy for the fox?

At times, I must admit, the strain has been very great. More than once (three times, to be exact) I have fired at that same fox to kill. I have lost many a rooster, but those I have not lost are many, many more. Browned to a turn, and garnished with parsley, a rooster is almost a poem. So was that wild fox, the other morning, almost a poem, standing on the bare knoll here near the house, his form half-shrouded in the early mist, his keen ears pricked, his pointed nose turned toward the yard where the hens were waking up.

Something primitive, something wild and free and stirring, something furtive, crafty, cunning — the shadow of the dark primeval forest, at sight of him, fell across the glaring commonplaceness of that whole tame day.

I will not ask, Was it worth the rooster? For that is too gross, too cheap a price to pay for a glimpse of wild life that set the dead nerves of the cave man in me thrilling with new life. Rather I would ask, Are such sights and thrills worth the deliberate purpose to have a woodlot, as well as a beanpatch and a henyard, on the farm?

Our American farm life needs new and better machinery, better methods, better buildings, better roads, better schools, better stock; but given all of these, and farm life must still continue to be earthy, material, mere beans — only more of them — until the farm is run on shares with all the universe around, until the farmer learns not only to reap the sunshine, but also to harvest the snow; learns to get a real and rich crop out of his landscape, his shy, wild neighbors, his independence and liberty, his various, difficult, yet strangely poetical, tasks.

But, if farm life tends constantly to become earthy, so does business life, and professional life — beans, all of it.

The farmers educated for mere efficiency, the merchants, the preachers, doctors, lawyers, educated for mere efficiency, are educated for mere beans. A great fortune, a great congregation, a great practice, a great farm crop, are one and all mere beans. Efficiency is not a whole education, nor meat a whole living, nor the worker the whole man.

And I said as much to Joel.

"Beans," I said, "must be raised. Much of life must be spent hoeing the beans. But I am going to ask myself: 'Is it *mere* beans that I am hoeing? And is it the *whole* of me that is hoeing the beans?'"

"Well," he replied, "you settle down on that farm of yours as I settled on mine, and I'll tell you what answer you'll get to them questions. There ain't no po'try about farmin'. God did n't intend there should be — as I see it."

"Now, that is n't the way I see it at all. This is God's earth, — and there could n't be a better one."

"Of course there could n't, but there was one once."

"When?" I asked, astonished.

"In the beginning."

"You mean the Garden of Eden?"

"Just that."

"Why, man, this earth, this farm of yours, *is* the Garden of Eden."

"But it says God drove him out of the Garden and, what's more, it says He made him farm for a livin', don't it?"

"That's what it says," I replied.

"Well, then, as I see it, that settles it, don't it? God puts a man on a farm when he ain't fit for anything else. 'Least, that's the way I see it.

That's how I got here, I s'pose, and I s'pose that's why I stay here."

"But," said I, "there's another version of that farm story."

"Not in the Bible?" he asked, now beginning to edge away, for it was not often that I could get him so near to books as this. Let me talk books with Joel Moore and the talk lags. Farming and neighboring are Joel's strong points, not books. He is a general farmer and a kind of universal neighbor (that being his specialty); on neighborhood and farm topics his mind is admirably full and clear.

"That other version is in the Bible, right along with the one you've been citing—just before it in Genesis."

He faced me squarely, a light of confidence in his eye, a ring of certainty, not to say triumph, in his tones:—

"You're sure of that, Professor?"

"Reasonably."

"Well, I'm not a college man, but I've read the Bible. Let's go in and take a look at Holy Writ on farmin',"—leading the way with alacrity into the house.

"My father was a great Bible man down in Maine," he went on. "Let me raise a curtain. This was his," pointing to an immense family Bible, with hand-wrought clasps, that lay beneath the plush family album, also clasped, on a frail little table in the middle of the parlor floor.

The daylight came darkly through the thick muslin draperies at the window and fell in a faint line across the floor. An oval frame of hair-flowers hung on the wall opposite me—a somber wreath of immortelles for the departed—*of* the departed—black, brown, auburn, and grizzled-gray, with one touch (a calla lily, I think) of the reddest hair I ever beheld. In one corner of the room stood a closed cabinet organ; behind me, a tall base-burner, polished till it seemed to light the dimmest corners of the room. There was no fire in the stove; there was no air in the room, only the mingled breath of soot and the hair-flowers and the plush album and the stuffed blue jay under the bell-jar on the mantelpiece, and the heavy brass-clasped Bible. There was no coffin in the room; but Joel took up the Bible and handed it to me as if we were having a funeral.

"Read me that other account of Adam's farm," he said; "I can't see without my specs."

In spite of a certain restraint of manner and evident uneasiness at the situation, he had something of boldness, even the condescension of the victor toward me. He was standing and looking down at me; yet he stood ill at ease by the table.

"Sit down, Joel," I said, assuming an authority in his house that I saw he could not quite feel.

"I can't; I 've got my overhalls on."

"Let us do all things decently and in order, Joel," I continued, touching the great Book reverently.

"But I never set in this room. My chair 's out there in the kitchen."

I moved over to the window to get what light I could, Joel following me with furtive, sidelong glances, as if he saw ghosts in the dark corners.

"We keep this room mostly for funerals," he volunteered, in order to stir up talk and lay what of the silence and the ghosts he could.

"I 'll read your story of Adam's farming first," I said, and began: "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth" — going on with the account of the dry, rainless world, and with no man to till the soil; then to the forming of Adam out of the dust, and the planting of Eden; of the rivers, of God's mistake in trying Adam alone in the Garden, of the rib made into Eve, of the prohibited tree, the snake, the wormy apple, the fall, the curse, the thorns — and how, in order to crown the curse and make it real, God drove the sinful pair forth from the Garden and condemned them to farm for a living.

"That 's it," Joel muttered with a mourner's groan. "That 's Holy Writ on farmin' as *I* understand it. Now, where 's the other story?"

"Here it is," I answered, "but we 've got to have some fresh air and more light on it," rising as I spoke and reaching for the bolt on the front door. With a single quick jerk I had it back, and throwing myself forward, swung the door wide to the open sky, while Joel groaned again, and the big, rusty hinges thrice groaned at the surprise and shock of it. But the thing was done.

A flood of warm, sweet sunshine poured over us; a breeze, wild-rose-and-elder-laden, swept in out of the broad meadow that stretched from the very doorstep to a distant hill of pines, and through the air, like a shower in June, fell the notes of soaring, singing bobolinks.

Joel stood looking out over his farm with the eyes of a stark stranger. He had never seen it from the front door before. It was a new prospect.

"Let 's sit here on the millstone step," I said, bringing the Bible out into the fresh air, "and I 'll read you something you never heard before," and I read,—laying the emphasis so as to render a new thing of the old story,—"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, and the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light; and there was light. And God saw the light that it was good. And God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light day, and the darkness he called night.

"And the evening and the morning were the first day."

Starting each new phase of the tale with "And God said," and bringing it to a close with "And

God saw that it was good," I read on through the seas and dry land, the sun and stars, and all living things, to man and woman — "male and female created he them" — and in his own likeness, blessing them and crowning the blessing with saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and *subdue* it," — farm for a living; rounding out the whole marvelous story with the sweet refrain: "And God saw *everything* that he had made, and behold it was *very* good.

"And the evening and the morning were the sixth day."

"*Thus*, Joel," I concluded, glancing at him as with opened eyes he looked out for the first time over his new meadow, — "*thus*, according to my belief, and not as you have been reading it, were the heavens and the earth finished and all the host of them."

He took the old book in his lap and sat silent with me for a while on the step. Then he said: —

"Nobody has got to the bottom of that book yet, have they? And it 's true; it 's all true. It 's just accordin' as you see it. Do ye know what

I 'm going to do? I 'm going to buy one of them double-seated red swings and put it right out here under this sassafras tree, and Hannah and I are going to set in, and swing in it, and listen a little to them bobolinks."

VIII

A PILGRIM FROM DUBUQUE

IT is a long road from anywhere to Mullein Hill, and only the rural postman and myself travel it at all frequently. The postman goes by, if he can, every weekday, somewhere between dawn and dark, the absolute uncertainty of his passing quite relieving the road of its wooded loneliness. I go back and forth somewhat regularly; now and then a neighbor takes this route to the village, and at rarer intervals an automobile speeds over the "roller coaster road"; but seldom does a stranger on foot appear so far from the beaten track. One who walks to Mullein Hill deserves and receives a welcome.

I may be carting gravel when he comes, as I was the day the Pilgrim from Dubuque arrived. Swinging the horses into the yard with their staggering load, I noticed him laboring up the Hill by the road in front. He stopped in the climb for a breathing spell, — a tall, erect old man in black, with soft, high-crowned hat, and about him something, even at the distance, that was — I don't know — unusual — old-fashioned — Presbyterian.

Dropping the lines, I went down to greet the stranger, though I saw he carried a big blue book under his arm. To my knowledge no book-agent had ever been seen on the Hill. But had I never seen one anywhere I should have known this man had not come to sell me a book. "More likely," I thought, "he has come to give me a book. We shall see." Yet I could not quite make him out, for while he was surely professional, he was not exactly clerical, in spite of a certain Scotch-Covenanter-something in his appearance. He had never preached *at* men, I knew, as instinctively as I knew he had never persuaded them with books or stocks or corner-lots in Lhassa. He had a fine, kindly face, that was singularly clear and simple, in which blent the shadows and sorrows of years with the serene and mellow light of good thoughts.

"Is this Mullein Hill?" he began, shifting the big blue copy of the "Edinburgh Review" from under his arm.

"You 're on Mullein Hill," I replied, "and welcome."

"Is — are — you Dallas Lore —"

"Sharp?" I said, finishing for him. "Yes, sir, this is Dallas Lore Sharp, but these are not his overalls — not yet; for they have never been washed and are about three sizes too large for him."

He looked at me, a little undone, I thought, disappointed, maybe, and a bit embarrassed at having been betrayed by overalls and rolled-up sleeves and shovels. He had not expected the overalls, not new ones, anyhow. And why are new overalls so terribly new and unwashed! Only a woman, only a man's wife, is fitted to buy his overalls, for she only is capable of allowing enough for shrinkage. To-day I was in my new pair, but not of them, not being able to get near enough to them for that.

"I am getting old," he went on quickly, his face clearing; "my perceptions are not so keen, nor my memory so quick as it used to be. I should have known that 'good writing must have a pre-literary existence as lived reality; the writing must be only the necessary accident of its being lived over again in thought'" — quoting verbatim, though I was slow in discovering it, from an essay of mine, published years before.

It was now my turn to allow for shrinkage. Had he learned this passage for the visit and applied it thus by chance? My face must have showed my wonder, my incredulity, indeed, for explaining himself he said, —

"I am a literary pilgrim, sir — "

"Who has surely lost his way," I ventured.

Then with a smile that made no more allowances necessary he assured me, —

"Oh, no, sir! I am quite at home in the hills of Hingham. I have been out at Concord for a few days, and am now on the main road from Concord to Dubuque. I am Mr. Kinnier, Dr. Kinnier, of Dubuque, Iowa, and" — releasing my hand — "let me see" — pausing as we reached the top of the hill, and looking about in search of something — "Ah, yes [to himself], there on the horizon they stand, those two village spires, 'those tapering steeples where they look up to worship toward the sky, and look down to scowl across the street'" — quoting again, word for word, from another of my essays. Then to me: "They are a little farther away and a little closer together than I expected to see them — too close [to himself again] for God to tell from which side of the street the prayers and praises come, mingling as they must in the air."

He said it with such thought-out conviction, such sweet sorrow, and with such relief that I began now to fear for what he might quote next and *miss* from the landscape. The spires were indeed there (may neither one of them now be struck by lightning!); but what a terrible memory the man has! Had he come from Dubuque to prove me —

The spires, however, seemed to satisfy him; he could steer by them; and to my great relief, he did not demand a chart to each of the wonders of Mullein Hill — my thirty-six woodchuck holes, etc., etc., nor ask, as John Burroughs did, for a sight of the fox that performed in one of my books somewhat after the manner of modern *literary* foxes. Literary foxes! One or another of us watches this Hilltop day and night with a gun for literary foxes! I want no pilgrims from Dubuque, no naturalists from Woodchuck Lodge, poking into the landscape or under the stumps for spires and foxes and boa constrictors and things that they cannot find outside the book. I had often wondered what I would do if such visitors ever came. Details, I must confess, might on many pages be difficult to verify; but for some years now I have faithfully kept my four boys here in the woods to prove the reality of my main theme.

This morning, with heaps of gravel in the yard, the hilltop looked anything but like the green and fruitful mountain of the book, still less like a way station between anywhere and *Concord!* And as for myself—it was no wonder he said to me,—

"Now, sir, please go on with your teaming. I ken the lay of the land about Mullein Hill

> "'Whether the simmer kindly warms
> Wi' life and light,
> Or winter howls in gusty storms
> The lang, dark night.'"

But I did not go on with the teaming. Gravel is a thing that will wait. Here it lies where it was dumped by the glaciers of the Ice Age. There was no hurry about it; whereas pilgrims and poets from Dubuque must be stopped as they pass. So we sat down and talked — of books and men, of poems and places, but mostly of books, — books I had written, and other books — great books "whose dwelling is the light of setting suns." Then we walked — over the ridges, down to the meadow and the stream, and up through the orchard, still talking of books, my strange visitor, whether the books were prose or poetry, catching up the volume somewhere with a favorite passage, and going on — reading on — from memory, line after line, pausing only to repeat some exquisite turn, or to comment upon some happy thought.

Not one book was he giving me, but many. The tiny leather-bound copy of Burns that he drew from his coat pocket he did not give me, however, but fondly holding it in his hands said: —

"It was my mother's. She always read to us out of it. She knew every line of it by heart as I do.

"'Some books are lies frae end to end' —

but this is no one of them. I have carried it these many years."

Our walk brought us back to the house and into the cool living-room where a few sticks were burning on the hearth. Taking one of the rocking-chairs before the fireplace, the Pilgrim sat for a time looking into the blaze. Then he began to rock gently back and forth, his eyes fixed upon the fire, quite forgetful evidently of my presence, and while he rocked his lips moved as, half audibly, he began to speak with some one — not with me — with some one invisible to me who had come to him out of the flame. I listened as he spoke, but it was a language that I could not understand.

Then remembering where he was he turned to me and said, his eyes going back again beyond the fire, —

"She often comes to me like this; but I am very lonely since she left me, — lonely — lonely — and so I came on to Concord to visit Thoreau's grave."

And this too was language I could not understand. I watched him in silence, wondering what was behind his visit to me.

"Thoreau was a lonely man," he went on, "as most writers are, I think, but Thoreau was very lonely."

"Wild," Burroughs had called him; "irritating," I had called him; and on the table beside the Pilgrim lay even then a letter from Mr. Burroughs, in which he had taken me to task on behalf of Thoreau.

"I feel like scolding you a little," ran the letter, "for disparaging Thoreau for my benefit. Thoreau is nearer the stars than I am. I may be more human, but he is certainly more divine. His moral and ethical value I think is much greater, and he has a heroic quality that I cannot approach."

There was something queer in this. Why had I not understood Thoreau? Wild he surely was, and irritating too, because of a certain strain and self-consciousness. A "counter-irritant" he called himself. Was this not true?

As if in answer to my question, as if to explain his coming out to Mullein Hill, the Pilgrim drew forth a folded sheet of paper from his pocket and without opening it or looking at it, said: —

"I wrote it the other day beside Thoreau's grave. You love your Thoreau — you will understand."

And then in a low, thrilling voice, timed as to some solemn chant, he began, the paper still folded in his hands: —

"A lonely wand'rer stands beside the stone
That marks the grave where Thoreau's ashes lie;
An object more revered than monarch's throne,
Or pyramids beneath Egyptian sky.

"He turned his feet from common ways of men,
And forward went, nor backward looked around;
Sought truth and beauty in the forest glen,
And in each opening flower glory found.

"He paced the woodland paths in rain and sun;
With joyous thrill he viewed the season's sign;
And in the murmur of the meadow run
With raptured ear he heard a voice divine.

"Truth was the beacon ray that lured him on.
It lit his path on plain and mountain height,
In wooded glade and on the flow'ry lawn —
Where'er he strayed, it was his guiding light.

"Close by the hoary birch and swaying pine
To Nature's voice he bent a willing ear;
And there remote from men he made his shrine,
Her face to see, her many tongues to hear.

"The robin piped his morning song for him;
The wild crab there exhaled its rathe perfume;
The loon laughed loud and by the river's brim
The water willow waved its verdant plume.

"For him the squirrels gamboled in the pines,
And through the pane the morning sunbeams glanced;
The zephyrs gently stirred his climbing vines
And on his floor the evening shadows danced.

"To him the earth was all a fruitful field.
He saw no barren waste, no fallow land;
The swamps and mountain tops would harvests yield;
And Nature's stores he garnered on the strand.

"There the essential facts of life he found.
The full ripe grain he winnowed from the chaff;
And in the pine tree,—rent by lightning round,
He saw God's hand and read his autograph.

"Against the fixed and complex ways of life
His earnest, transcendental soul rebelled;
And chose the path that shunned the wasted strife,
Ignored the sham, and simple life upheld.

"Men met him, looked and passed, but knew him not,
And critics scoffed and deemed him not a seer.
He lives, and scoff and critic are forgot;
We feel his presence and his words we hear.

"He passed without regret,—oft had his breath
Bequeathed again to earth his mortal clay,
Believing that the darkened night of death
Is but the dawning of eternal day."

The chanting voice died away and — the woods were still. The deep waters of Walden darkened in the long shadows of the trees that were reaching out across the pond. Evening was close at hand. Would the veery sing again? Or was it the faint, sweet music of the bells of Lincoln, Acton, and Concord that I heard, humming in the pine needles outside the window, as if they were the strings of a harp?

The chanting voice died away and — the room was still; but I seem to hear that voice every time I open the pages of "The Week" or "Walden." And the other day, as I stood on the shores of the pond, adding my stone to the cairn where the cabin used to stand, a woodthrush off in the trees (trees that have grown great since Thoreau last looked upon them), began to chant — or was it the Pilgrim from Dubuque? —

"Truth was the beacon ray that lured him on.
It lit his path on plain and mountain height,
In wooded glade and on the flow'ry lawn —
Where'er he strayed, it was his guiding light."

IX

THE HONEY FLOW

AND this our life, exempt from public haunt and those swift currents that carry the city-dweller resistlessly into the movie show, leaves us caught in the quiet eddy of little unimportant things, — digging among the rutabagas, playing the hose at night, casting the broody hens into the "dungeon," or watching the bees.

Many hours of my short life I have spent watching the bees, — blissful, idle hours, saved from the wreck of time, hours fragrant of white clover and buckwheat and filled with the honey of nothing-to-do; every minute of them capped, like the comb within the hive, against the coming winter of my discontent. If, for the good of mankind, I could write a new Commandment to the Decalogue, it would read: Thou shalt keep a hive of bees.

Let one begin early, and there is more health in a hive of bees than in a hospital; more honey, too, more recreation and joy for the philosophic mind, though no one will deny that very many persons prepare themselves both in body and mind for the comforting rest and change of the hospital with an almost solemn joy.

But personally I prefer a hive of bees. They are a sure cure, it is said, for rheumatism, the patient making bare the afflicted part, then with it stirring up the bees. But it is saner and happier to get the bees before you get the rheumatism and prevent its coming. No one can keep bees without being impressed with the wisdom of the ounce of prevention.

I cannot think of a better habit to contract than keeping bees. What a quieting, pastoral turn it gives to life! You can keep them in the city — on the roof or in the attic — just as you can actually live in the city, if you have to; but bees, even more than cows, suggest a rural prospect, old-fashioned gardens, pastures, idyls, —

things out of Virgil, and Theocritus — and out of Spenser too, —

> "And more, to lulle him in his slumber soft,
> A trickling streame from high rock tumbling downe,
> And ever drizling raine upon the loft,
> Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne
> Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swowne:
> No other noyse, nor peoples troublous cryes,
> As still are wont t' annoy the walled towne
> Might there be heard: but carelesse Quiet lyes,
> Wrapt in eternall silence farre from enimyes"

that is not the land of the lotus, but of the *mellilotus*, of lilacs, red clover, mint, and goldenrod — a land of honey-bee. Show me the bee-keeper and I will show you a poet; a lover of waters that go softly like Siloa; with the breath of sage and pennyroyal about him; an observer of nature, who can handle his bees without veil or gloves. Only a few men keep bees, — only philosophers, I have found. They are a different order utterly from hen-men, bee-keeping and chicken-raising being respectively the poetry and prose of country life, though there are some things to be said for the hen, deficient as the henyard is in euphony, rhythm, and tune.

In fact there is not much to be said for the bee, not much that the public can understand; for it is neither the bee nor the eagle that is the true American bird, but the rooster. In one of my neighboring towns five thousand petitioners recently prayed the mayor that they be allowed to let their roosters crow. The petition was granted. In all that town, peradventure, not five bee-keepers could be found, and for the same reason that so few righteous men were found in Sodom.

Bee-keeping, like keeping righteous, is exceedingly difficult; it is one of the fine arts, and no dry-mash-and-green-bone affair as of hens. Queens are a peculiar people, and their royal households, sometimes an hundred thousand strong, are as individual as royal houses are liable to be.

I have never had two queens alike, never two colonies that behaved the same, never two seasons that made a repetition of a particular handling possible. A colony of bees is a perpetual problem; the strain of the bees, the age and disposition of the queen, the condition of the colony, the state of the weather, the time of the season, the little-understood laws of the honey-flow, — these singly, and often all in combination, make the wisest handling of a colony of bees a question fresh every summer morning and new every evening.

For bees should be "handled," that is, bees left to their own devices may make you a little honey — ten to thirty pounds in the best of seasons; whereas rightly handled they will as easily make you three hundred pounds of pure comb honey — food of prophets, and with saleratus biscuit instead of locusts, a favorite dish with the sons of prophets here on Mullein Hill.

Did you ever eat apple-blossom honey? Not often, for it is only rarely that the colony can be built up to a strength sufficient to store this earliest flow. But I have sometimes caught it; and then as the season advances, and flow after flow comes on with the breaking of the great floral waves, I get other flavors, — pure white clover, wild raspberry, golden sumac, pearly white clethra, buckwheat, black as axle grease, and last of all, the heavy, rich yellow of the goldenrod. These, by careful watching, I get pure and true to flavor like so many fruit extracts at the soda fountains.

Then sometimes the honey for a whole season will be adulterated, not by anything that I have done, but by the season's peculiar conditions, or by purely local conditions, — conditions that may not prevail in the next town at all.

One year it began in the end of July. The white clover flow was over and the bees were beginning to work upon the earliest blossoms of the dwarf sumac. Sitting in front of the hives soon after the renewed activity commenced, I noticed a peculiarly rank odor on the air, and saw that the bees in vast numbers were rising and making for a pasture somewhere over the sproutland that lay to the north of the hives. Yet I felt sure there was nothing in blossom in that direction within range of my bees (they will fly off two miles for food); nothing but dense hardwood undergrowth from stumps cut some few years before.

Marking their line of flight I started into the low jungle to find them. I was half a mile in when I caught the busy hum of wings. I looked but could see nothing, — not a flower of any sort, nothing but oak, maple, birch, and young pine saplings just a little higher than my head. But the air was full of bees; yet not of swarming bees, for that is a different and unmistakable hum. Then I found myself in the thick of a copse of witch-hazel up and down the stems of which the bees were wildly buzzing. There was no dew left on the bushes, so it was not that they were after; on looking more closely I saw that they were crawling down the stems to the little burrs containing the seed of last fall's flowering. Holding to the top of the burr with their hind legs they seemed to drink head down from out of the base of the burr.

Picking one of these, I found a hole at its base, and inside, instead of seeds, a hollow filled with plant lice or aphides, that the bees were milking. Here were big black ants, too, and yellow wasps drinking from the same pail.

But a bee's tongue, delicate as it is, would crush a fragile plant louse. I picked another burr, squeezing it gently, when there issued from the hole at the base a drop of crystal-clear liquid, held in the thinnest of envelopes, which I tasted and found sweet. In burr after burr I found these sacks or cysts of sweets secreted by the aphides for the bees to puncture and drain. The largest of them would fill a bee at a draught. Some of the burrs contained big fat grubs of a beetle unknown to me, — the creature that had eaten the seeds, bored the hole at the base, and left the burr cleaned and garnished for the aphides. These in turn invited the bees, and the bees, carrying this "honey-dew" home, mixed it with the pure nectar of the flowers and spoiled the crop.

Can you put stoppers into these millions of honey-dew jugs? Can you command your bees to avoid these dire bushes and drink only of the wells at the bottoms of the white-clover tubes? Hardly that, but you can clip the wing of your queen and make her obedient; you can command the colony not to swarm, not to waste its strength in drones, and you can tell it where and how to put this affected honey so that the pure crop is not spoiled; you can order the going out and coming in of those many thousands so that every one is a faithful, wise, and efficient servant, gathering the fragrance and sweet of the summer from every bank whereon the clover and the wild mints blow.

Small things these for a man with anything to do? Small indeed, but demanding large love and insight, patience, foresight, and knowledge. It does not follow that a man who can handle a colony of bees can rule his spirit or take a city, but the virtues absolutely necessary to the bee-keeper are those required for the guiding of nations; and there should be a bee-plank incorporated into every party platform, promising that president, cabinet, and every member of congress along with the philosophers shall keep bees.

X

A PAIR OF PIGS

I DROPPED down beside Her on the back steps and took a handful of her peas to pod. She set the colander between us, emptied half of her task into my hat, and said: —

"It is ten o'clock. I thought you had to be at your desk at eight this morning? And you are hot and tired. What is it you have been doing?"

"Getting ready for the *pigs*," I replied, laying marked and steady emphasis on the plural.

"You are putting the pods among the peas and the peas with the pods" — and so I was. "Then we are going to have another pig," she went on.

"No, not *a* pig this time; I think I'll get a pair. You see while you are feeding one you can just as well be feeding — "

"A lot of them," she said with calm conviction.

"You 're right!" I exclaimed, a little eagerly. "Besides two pigs do better than — "

"Well, then," very gravely and never pausing for an instant in her shelling, "let 's fence in the fourteen acres and have a nice little piggery of Mullein Hill."

The pods popped and split in her nimble fingers as if she knew a secret spring in their backs. I can beat her picking peas, but in shelling peas she seems to have more fingers than I have; they quite confuse me at times as they twinkle at their task.

So they did now. I had spent several weeks working up my brief for two pigs; but was utterly unprepared for a whole piggery. The suddenness of it, the sweep and compass of it, left me powerless to pod the peas for a moment.

I ought to have been at my writing, but it was too late to mention that now; besides here was my hat still full of peas. I could not ungallantly dump them back into her empty pan and quit. There was nothing for it but to pod on and stop with one pig. But my heart was set on a pair of pigs. College had just closed (we were having our 17th of June peas) and the joy of the farm was upon me. I had a cow and a heifer, eighty-six hens, three kinds of bantams, ten hives of bees, and two ducks. I was planning to build a pigeon coop, and had long talked of turning the nine-acre ridge of sprout land joining my farm into a milch goat pasture, selling the milk at one dollar a quart to Boston babies; I had thought somewhat of Belgian hares and black foxes as a side-line; and in addition to these my heart was set on a pair of pigs.

"Why won't one pig do?" she would ask. And I tried to explain; but there are things that cannot be explained to the feminine mind, things perfectly clear to a man that you cannot make a woman see.

Pigs, I told her, naturally go by pairs, like twins and scissors and tongs. They do better together, as scissors do. Nobody ever bought a *scissor*. Certainly not. Pigs need the comfort of one another's society, and the diversion of one another to take up their minds in the pen; hens I explained were not the only broody creatures, for all animals show the tendency, and does not the Preacher say, "Two are better than one: if two lie together then have they heat: but how can one be warm alone"?

I was sure, I told her, that the Preacher had pigs in mind, for judging by the number of pig-prohibitions throughout Hebrew literature, they must have had pigs *constantly* in mind. This observation of the early Hebrew poet and preacher is confirmed, I added, by all the modern agricultural journals, as well as by all our knowing neighbors. Even the Flannigans (an Irish family down the road), — even the Flannigans, I pointed out, always have two pigs, for all their eight children and his job tending gate at the railroad crossing. They have a goat, too. If a man with that sort of job can have eight children and a goat and two pigs, why can't a college professor have a few of the essential, elementary things, I'd like to know?

"Do you call your four boys a *few?*" she asked.

"I don't call my four Flannigan's eight," I replied, "nor my one pig his two. Flannigan has the finest pigs on the road. He has a wonderful way with a pair of pigs — something he inherited, I suppose, for I imagine there have been pigs in the Flannigan family ever since — "

"They were kings in Ireland," she put in sweetly.

"Flannigan says," I continued, "that I ought to have two pigs: 'For shure, a pair o' pags is double wan pag,' says Flannigan — good clear logic it strikes me, and quite convincing."

She picked up the colander of shelled peas with a sigh. "We shall want the new potatoes and fresh salmon to go with these," her mind not on pigs at all, but on the dinner. "Can't you dig me a few?"

"I might dig up a few fresh salmon," I replied, "but not any new potatoes, for they have just got through the ground."

"But if I wanted you to, could n't you?"

"I don't see how I could if there are n't any to dig."

"But won't you go look — dig up a few hills — you can't tell until you look. You said you did n't leave the key outside in the door yesterday when we went to town, but you did. And as for a lot of pigs — "

"I don't want a lot of pigs," I protested.

"But you do, though. You want a lot of everything. Here you 've planted five hundred cabbages for winter just as if we were a sauerkraut factory — and the probabilities are we shall go to town this winter — "

"Go where!" I cried.

"And as for pigs, your head is as full of pigs as Deerfoot Farm or the Chicago stockyards—

Mullein Hill Sausages
Made of Little Pigs

that's really your dream" — spelling out the advertisement with pea-pods on the porch floor.

"Now, don't you think it best to save some things for your children, — this sausage business, say, — and you go on with your humble themes and books?"

She looked up at me patiently, sweetly inscrutable as she added: —

"You need a pig, Dallas, one pig, I am quite sure; but two pigs are nothing short of the pig business, and that is not what we are living here on Mullein Hill for."

She went in with her peas and left me with my pigs — or perhaps they were her thoughts; leaving thoughts around being a habit of hers.

What did she mean by my needing a pig? She was quite sure I needed *one* pig. Is it my own peculiar, personal need? That can hardly be, for I am not different from other men. There may be in all men, deep down and unperceived, except by their wives, perhaps, traits and tendencies that call for the keeping of a pig. I think this must be so, for while she has always said *we* need the cow or the chickens or the parsley, she has never spoken so of the pig, it being referred to invariably as mine, until put into the cellar in a barrel.

The pig as my property, or rather as my peculiar privilege, is utterly unrelated in her mind to *salt* pork. And she is right about that. No man needs a pig to put in a barrel. Everybody knows that it costs less to buy your pig in the barrel. And there is little that is edifying about a barrel of salt pork. I always try to fill my mind with cheerful thoughts before descending into the dark of the cellar to fish a cold, white lump of the late pig out of the pickle.

Not in the uncertain hope of his becoming pork, but for the certain present joy of his *being* pork, does a man need a pig. In all his other possessions man is always to be blest. In the pig he has a constant, present reward: because the pig *is* and there is no question as to what he shall be. He is pork and shall be salt pork, not spirit, to our deep relief.

Instead of spirit the pig is clothed upon with lard, a fatty, opaque, snow-white substance, that boils and grows limpid clear and flames with heat; and while not so volatile and spirit-like as butter, nevertheless it is one of earth's pure essences, perfected, sublimated, not after the soul with suffering, but after the flesh with corn and solid comfort — the most abundant of one's possessions, yet except to the pig the most difficult of all one's goods to bestow.

The pig has no soul. I am not so sure of the flower in the crannied wall, not so sure of the very stones in the wall, so long have they been, so long shall be; but the pig — no one ever plucked up a pig from his sty to say, —

> "I hold you here squeal and all, in my hand,
> Little pig — but *if* I could understand
> What you are, squeal and all, and all in all" —

No poet or philosopher ever did that. But they have kept pigs. Here is Matthew Arnold writing to his mother about *Literature and Dogma* and poems and—"The two pigs are grown very large and handsome, and Peter Wood advises us to fatten them and kill our own bacon. We consume a great deal of bacon, and Flu complains that it is dear and not good, so there is much to be said for killing our own; but she does not seem to like the idea."

"Very large and handsome"—this from the author of

> "The evening comes, the fields are still!"

And here is his wife, again, not caring to have them killed, finding, doubtless, a better use for them in the pen, seeing that Matthew often went out there to scratch them.

Poets, I say, have kept pigs, for a change, I think, from their poetry. For a big snoring pig is not a poem, whatever may be said of a little roast pig; and what an escape from books and people and parlors (in this country) is the feeding and littering and scratching of him! You put on your old clothes for him. He takes you out behind the barn; there shut away from the prying gaze of the world, and the stern eye, conscience, you deliberately fill him, stuff him, fatten him, till he grunts, then you scratch him to keep him grunting, yourself reveling in the sight of the flesh indulged, as you dare not indulge any other flesh. You would love to feed the whole family that way; only it would not be good for them. You cannot feed even the dog or the horse or the hens so. One meal a day for the dog; a limited ration of timothy for the horse, and *scratch*-feed for the hens — feed to compel them to scratch for fear they will run to flesh instead of eggs; and the children's wedge of pie you sharpen though the point of it pierces your soul; and the potato you leave off of her plate; and you forgo your — you get *you* a medicine ball, I should say, in order to keep down the fat lest it overlie and smother the soul.

Compelled to deny and subject the body, what do I then but get me a pig and feed *it*, and scratch it, and bed it in order to see it fatten and to hear it snore? The flesh cries out for indulgence; but the spirit demands virtue; and a pig, being the virtue of indulgence, satisfies the flesh and is winked at by the soul.

If a pig is the spirit's concession to the flesh, no less is he at times a gift to the spirit. There are times in life when one needs just such companionship as the pig's, and just such shelter as one finds within his pen. After a day in the classroom discoursing on the fourth dimension of things in general, I am prone to feel somewhat removed, at sea somewhat.

Then I go down and spread my arms along the fence and come to anchor with the pig.

XI

LEAFING

POETS, I said, have kept pigs for an escape from their poetry. But keeping pigs is not all prose. I put my old clothes on to feed him, it is true; he takes me out behind the barn; but he also takes me one day in the year out into the woods — a whole day in the woods — with rake and sacks and hay-rig, and the four boys, to gather him leaves for bedding.

Leafing Day is one of the days in red on the Mullein Hill Calendar; and of all our days in the woods surely none of them is fresher, more fragrant, more joyous, and fuller of poetry than the day we go to rake and sack and bring home the leaves for the pig.

You never went after leaves for the pigs? Perhaps you never even had a pig. But a pig is worth having, if only to see the comfort he takes in the big bed of dry leaves you give him in the sunny corner of his pen. And, if leafing had no other reward, the thought of the snoozing, snoring pig buried to his winking snout in the bed, would give joy and zest enough to the labor.

But leafing like every other humble labor of our life here in the Hills of Hingham has its own reward, — and when you can say that of any labor you are speaking of its poetry.

We jolt across the bumpy field, strike into the back wood-road, and turn off upon an old stumpy track over which cordwood was carted years ago. Here in the hollow at the foot of a high wooded hill the winds have whirled the oak and maple leaves into drifts almost knee-deep.

We are off the main road, far into the heart of the woods. We straddle stumps, bend down saplings, stop while the horse takes a bite of sweet birch, tack and tip and tumble and back through the tight squeezes between the trees; and finally, after a prodigious amount of "whoa"-ing and "oh"-ing and squealing and screeching, we land right side up and so headed that we can start the load out toward the open road.

You can yell all you want to when you go leafing, yell at every stump you hit, yell every time a limb knocks off your hat or catches you under the chin, yell when the horse stops suddenly to browse on the twigs, and stands you meekly on your head in the bottom of the rig. You can screech and howl and yell like the wild Indian that you are; you can dive and wrestle in the piles of leaves, and cut all the crazy capers you know; for this is a Saturday; these are the wild woods and the noisy leaves; and who is there looking on besides the mocking jays and the crows?

The leaves pile up. The wind blows keen among the tall, naked trees; the dull clouds hang low above the ridge; and through the cold gray of the maple swamp below peers the ghostly face of Winter.

You start up the ridge with your rake, and draw down another pile, thinking, as you work, of the pig. The thought is pleasing. The warm glow all over your body strikes in to your heart. You rake away as if it were your own bed you were gathering — as really it is. He that rakes for his pig rakes also for himself. A merciful man is merciful to his beast, and he that gathers leaves for his pig spreads a blanket of down over his own winter bed.

Is it to warm my feet on winter nights that I pull on my boots at ten o'clock and go my round at the barn? Yet it does warm my feet, through and through, to look into the stalls and see the cow chewing her cud, and the horse cleaning up his supper hay, standing to his fetlocks in his golden bed of new rye-straw; and then, going to the pig's pen, to hear him snoring louder than the north wind, somewhere in the depths of his leaf-bed, far out of sight. It warms my feet, it also warms my heart.

So the leaves pile up. How good a thing it is to have a pig to work for! What zest and purpose it lends to one's raking and piling and storing! If I could get nothing else to spend myself on, I should surely get me a pig. Then, when I went to walk in the woods, I should be obliged occasionally to carry a rake and a bag with me, much better things to take into the woods than empty hands, and sure to scratch into light a number of objects that would never come within the range of opera-glass or gun or walking-stick. To see things through a twenty-four-toothed rake is to see them very close, as through a microscope magnifying twenty-four diameters.

And so, as the leaves pile up, we keep a sharp lookout for what the rake uncovers; here under a rotten stump a hatful of acorns, probably gathered by the white-footed wood-mouse. For the stump "gives" at the touch of the rake, and a light kick topples it down hill, spilling out a big nest of feathers and three dainty little creatures that scurry into the leaf-piles like streaks of daylight. They are the white-footed mice, long-tailed, big-eared, and as clean and high-bred-looking as greyhounds.

Combing down the steep hillside with our rakes, we dislodge a large stone, exposing a black patch of fibrous roots and leaf-mould, in which something moves and disappears. Scooping up a double handful of the mould, we capture a little red-backed salamander.

Listen! Something piping! Above the rustle of the leaves we, too, hear a "fine, plaintive" sound — no, a shrill and ringing little racket, rather, about the bigness of a penny whistle.

Dropping the rake, we cautiously follow up the call (it seems to speak out of every tree-trunk!) and find the piper clinging to a twig, no salamander at all, but a tiny wood-frog, Pickering's hyla, his little bagpipe blown almost to bursting as he tries to rally the scattered summer by his tiny, mighty "skirl." Take him nose and toes, he is surely as much as an inch long; not very large to pipe against this north wind that has been turned loose in the bare woods.

We go back to our raking. Above us, among the stones of the slope, hang bunches of Christmas fern; around the foot of the trees we uncover trailing clusters of gray-green partridge vine, glowing with crimson berries; we rake up the prince's-pine, pipsissewa, creeping-Jennie, and wintergreen red with ripe berries — a whole bouquet of evergreens, exquisite, fairy-like forms that later shall gladden our Christmas table.

But how they gladden and cheer the October woods! Summer dead? Hope all gone? Life vanished away? See here, under this big pine, a whole garden of arbutus, green and budded, almost ready to bloom! The snows shall come before their sweet eyes open; but open they will at the very first touch of spring. We will gather a few, and let them wake up in saucers of clean water in our sunny south windows.

Leaves for the pig, and arbutus for us! We make a clean sweep down the hillside "jumping" a rabbit from its form under a brush-pile, discovering where a partridge roosts in a low-spreading hemlock; coming upon a snail cemetery in a hollow hickory stump; turning up a yellow-jackets' nest built two thirds underground; tracing the tunnel of a bobtailed mouse in its purposeless windings in the leaf-mould, digging into a woodchuck's—

"But come, boys, get after those bags! It is leaves in the hay-rig we want, not woodchucks at the bottom of woodchuck-holes."

Two small boys catch up a bag, and hold it open, while two more stuff in the crackling leaves. Then I come along with my big feet, and pack the leaves in tight, and on to the rig goes the bulging bag.

Exciting? If you can't believe it exciting, hop up on the load, and let us jog you home. Swish! bang! thump! tip! turn! joggle! jolt! Hold on to your ribs. Pull in your popping eyes. Look out for the stump! Is n't it fun to go leafing? Is n't it fun to do anything that your heart does with you?—even though you do it for a pig!

Just watch the pig as we shake out the bags of leaves. See him caper, spin on his toes, shake himself, and curl his tail. That curl is his laugh. We double up and weep when we laugh hard; but the pig can't weep, and he can't double himself up; so he doubles up his tail. There is where his laugh comes off, curling and kinking in little spasms of pure pig joy.

"Boosh! Boosh!" he snorts, and darts around the pen like a whirlwind, scattering the leaves in forty ways, to stop short—the shortest stop!—and fall to rooting for acorns.

He was once a long-tusked boar of the forest, this snow-white, sawed-off, pug-nose little porker of mine—ages and ages ago. But he still remembers the smell of the forest leaves; he still knows the taste of the acorn-mast; he is still wild pig somewhere deep down within him.

And we were once long-haired, strong-limbed savages who roamed the forest for him — ages and ages ago. And we, too, like him, remember the smell of the fallen leaves, and the taste of the forest fruits, and of pig, *roast* pig. And if the pig in his heart is still a wild boar, no less are we at times wild savages in our hearts.

Anyhow, for one day in the fall I want to go leafing. I want to give my pig a taste of acorns, and a big pile of leaves to dive so deep into that he cannot see his pen. No, I do not live in a pen; I do not want to; but surely I might, if once in a while I did not go leafing, did not escape now and then from my little penned-in, daily round into the wide, sweet woods, my ancestral home.

XII

THE LITTLE FOXES

I WAS picking strawberries down by the woods when some one called out from the road: —

"Say, ain't they a litter of young foxes somewheres here in the ridges?"

I recognized the man as one of the chronic fox-hunters of the region, and answered: —

"I 'm sure of it, by the way an old she-fox has pestered my chickens lately."

"Well, she won't pester them no more. She 's been trapped and killed. Any man that would kill a she-fox this time o' year and let her pups starve to death, he ain't no better than a brute, he ain't. I 've hunted two days for 'em; and I 'll hunt till I find 'em." And he disappeared into the woods, on my side of the road, upon a quest so utterly futile, apparently, and so entirely counter to the notion I had had of the man, that I stopped my picking and followed him up the ridge, just to see which way a man would go to find a den of suckling foxes in all the miles and miles of swamp and ledgy woodland that spread in every direction about him. I did not see which way he went, for by the time I reached the crest he had gone on and out of hearing through the thick sprout-land. I sat down, however, upon a stump to think about him, this man of the shoe-shop, working his careful way up and down the bushy slopes, around the granite ledges, across the bogs and up-grown pastures, into the matted green-brier patches, hour after hour searching for a hole in the ground a foot wide, for a den of little foxes that were whimpering and starving because their mother did not return.

He found them — two miles away in the next town, on the edge of an open field, near a public road, and directly across from a schoolhouse! I don't know how he found them. But patience and knowledge and love, and a wild, primitive instinct that making shoes had never taken out of his primitive nature, helped him largely in his hunt. He took them, nursed them back to strength on a bottle, fed them milk and rice until they could forage for themselves, turned them loose in the woods, and then, that fall, he shot them one after the other as often as he had a holiday from the shop, or a moonlight night upon which he could hunt.

But he did not kill all of them. Seven foxes were shot at my lower bars last winter. It is now strawberry time again, and again an old she-fox lies in wait for every hen that flies over the chicken-yard fence — which means another litter of young foxes somewhere here in the ridges. The line continues, even at the hands of the man with the gun. For strangely coupled with the desire to kill is the instinct to save, in human nature and in all nature — to preserve a remnant, that no line perish forever from the earth. As the unthinkable ages of geology come and go, animal and vegetable forms arise, change, and disappear; but life persists, lines lead on, and in some form many of the ancient families breathe our air and still find a home on this small and smaller-growing globe of ours.

And it may continue so for ages yet, with our help and permission.

Wild life is changing more rapidly to-day than ever before, is being swept faster and faster toward the brink of the world; but it is cheering to look out of my window, as I write, and see the brown thrasher getting food for her young out of the lawn, to hear the scratch of squirrels' feet across the porch, to catch a faint and not unpleasant odor of skunk through the open window as the breeze blows in from the woods, and to find, as I found in hoeing my melons early this morning, the pointed prints of a fox making in a confident and knowing line toward the chicken-yard.

I have lived some forty years upon the earth (how the old hickory outside my window mocks me!), and I have seen some startling changes in wild animal life. Even I can recall a great flock of snowy herons, or egrets, that wandered up from the South one year and stayed a while on the Maurice River marshes, just as, in earlier times, it is recorded that along the Delaware "the white cranes did whiten the river-bank like a great snow-drift." To-day the snowy herons have all but vanished from the remotest glades of the South; and my friend Finley, on the trail of the Western plume-hunters, searched in vain for a single pair of the exquisite birds in the vast tule lakes of Oregon, where, only a few weeks before his trip, thousands of pairs had nested. He found heaps of rotting carcasses stripped of their fatally lovely plumes; he found nests with eggs and dead young, but no live birds; the family of snowy herons, the whole race, apparently, had been suddenly swept off the world, annihilated, and was no more.

A few men with guns — for money — had done it. And the wild areas of the world, especially of our part of the world, have grown so limited now that a few men could easily, quickly destroy, blot out from the book of life, almost any of our bird and animal families. "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet" — literally, and he must go softly now lest the very fowl of the air and fish of the sea be destroyed forever. Within my memory the passenger pigeon, by some cataclysm perhaps, has apparently become extinct; and the ivory-billed woodpecker probably, this latter by the hand of man, for I knew the man who believed that he had killed the last pair of these noble birds reported from the Florida forests. So we thought it had fared also with the snowy heron, but recently we have had word from the wardens of the Audubon Society that a remnant has escaped; a few pairs of the birds have been discovered along the Gulf coast — so hardly can Nature forgo her own! So far away does the mother of life hide her child, and so cunningly!

With our immediate and intelligent help, this family of birds, from these few pairs can be saved and spread again over the savannas of the South and the wide tule lakes in the distant Northwest.

The mother-principle, the dominant instinct in all life, is not failing in our time. As Nature grows less capable (and surely she does!) of mothering her own, then man must turn mother, as he has in the Audubon Society; as he did in the case of the fellow from the shoe-shop who saved the little foxes. And there is this to hearten him, that, while extinction of the larger forms of animal life seems inevitable in the future, a little help and constant help now will save even the largest of our animals for a long time to come.

The way animal life hangs on against almost insuperable odds, and the power in man's hands to further or destroy it, is quite past belief until one has watched carefully the wild creatures of a thickly settled region.

The case of the Indian will apply to all our other aborigines. It is somewhat amazing to be told, as we are on good authority, that there are probably more live Indians on the reservations to-day than there were all told over all of North America when the white men first came here. Certainly they have been persecuted, but they have also been given protection — pens!

Wild life, too, will thrive, in spite of inevitable persecution and repression, if given only a measure of protection.

Year by year the cities spread, the woods and wild places narrow, yet life holds on. The fox trots free across my small farm, and helps himself successfully from the poultry of my careful raising.

Nature — man-nature — has been hard on the little brute — to save him! His face has grown long from much experience, and deep-lined with wisdom. He seems a normal part of civilization; he literally passes in and out of the city gates, roams at large through my town, and dens within the limits of my farm. Enduring, determined, resourceful, quick-witted, soft-footed, he holds out against a pack of enemies that keep continually at his heels, and runs in his race the race of all life, winning for all life, with our help, a long lease yet upon the earth.

For here is Reynard sitting upon a knoll in the road, watching me tear down upon him in a thirty-horse-power motor-car. He steps into the bushes to let me pass, then comes back to the road and trots upon his four adequate legs back to the farm to see if I left the gate of the henyard open.

There is no sight of Nature more heartening to me than this glimpse of the fox; no thought of Nature more reassuring than the thought of the way Reynard holds his own — of the long-drawn, dogged fight that Nature will put up when cornered and finally driven to bay. The globe is too small for her eternally to hold out against man; but with the help of man, and then in spite of man, she will fight so good a fight that not for years yet need another animal form perish from the earth.

If I am assuming too much authority, it is because, here in the remoteness of my small woods where I can see at night the lights of the distant city, I have personally taken a heartless hand in this determined attempt to exterminate the fox. No, I do not raise fancy chickens in order to feed him. On the contrary, much as I love to see him, I keep a double-barreled gun against his coming. He knows it, and comes just the same. At least the gun does not keep him away. My neighbors have dogs, but they do not keep him away. Guns, dogs, traps, poison — nothing can keep the foxes away.

It must have been about four o'clock the other morning when one of my children tiptoed into my room and whispered, "Father, there 's the old fox walking around Pigeon-Henny's coop behind the barn."

I got up and hurried with the little fellow into his room, and sure enough, there in the fog of the dim morning I could make out the form of a fox moving slowly around the small coop.

The old hen was clucking in terror to her chicks, her cries having awakened the small boys.

I got myself down into the basement, seized my gun, and, gliding out through the cellar door, crept stealthily into the barn.

The back window was open. The thick, wet fog came pouring in like smoke. I moved up boldly through the heavy smother and looked down into the field. There was the blur of the small coop, but where was the fox?

Pushing the muzzle of my double-barreled gun out across the window-sill, I waited.

Yes, there, through a rift in the fog, stood the fox! What a shot! The old rascal cocked his ears toward the house. All was still. Quickly under the wire of the coop went his paw, the old hen fluttering and crying in fresh terror.

Carefully, noiselessly, I swung the muzzle of the gun around on the window-sill until the bead drew dead upon the thief. The cow in her stall beside me did not stir. I knew that four small boys in the bedroom window had their eyes riveted upon that fox waiting for me to fire. It was a nervous situation, so early in the morning, in the cold, white fog, and without anything much but slippers on. Usually, of course, I shot in boots.

But there stood the fox clawing out my young chickens, and, steadying the gun as best I could on the moving window-sill, I fired.

That the fox jumped is not to be wondered at. I jumped myself as both barrels went off together. A gun is a sudden thing any time of day, but so early in the morning, and when everything was wrapped in silence and the ocean fog, the double explosion was extremely startling.

I should have fired only one barrel, for the fox, after jumping, turned around and looked all over the end of the barn to see if the shooting were going to happen again. I wished then that I had saved the other barrel.

All I could do was to shout at him, which made him run off.

The boys wanted to know if I thought I had killed the hen. On going out later I found that I had not even hit the coop — not so bad a shot, after all, taking into account the size of the coop and the thick, distorting qualities of the weather.

There is no particular credit to the fox in this, nor do I come in for any particular credit this time; but the little drama does illustrate the chances in the game of life, chances that sometimes, usually indeed, are in favor of the fox.

He not only got away, but he also got away with eleven out of the twelve young chicks in that brood. He had dug a hole under the wire of the coop, then, by waiting his chance, or by frightening the chicks out, had eaten all of them but one.

That he escaped this time was sheer luck; that he got his breakfast before escaping was due to his cunning. And I have seen so many instances of his cunning that, with my two scientific eyes wide open, I could believe him almost as wise as he was thought to be in the olden days of fable and folk-lore. How cool and collected he can be, too!

One day last autumn I was climbing the steep ridge behind the mowing-field when I heard a fox-hound yelping over in the hollow beyond. Getting cautiously to the top of the ridge, I saw the hound off below me on the side of the parallel ridge across the valley. He was beating slowly along through the bare sprout-land, and evidently having a hard time holding the trail. Now and then he would throw his head up into the air and howl, a long, doleful howl, as if in protest, begging the fox to stop its fooling and play fair.

The hound was walking, not running, and at a gait almost as deliberate as his howl. Round and round in one place he would go, off this way, off that, then back, until, catching the scent again, or in despair of ever hitting it (I don't know which), he would stand stock-still and howl.

That the hound was tired I felt sure; but that he was on the trail of a fox I could not believe; and I was watching him curiously when something stirred on the top of the ridge almost beside me.

Without turning so much as my head, I saw the fox, a beautiful creature, going slowly round and round in a circle — in a figure eight, rather — among the bushes; then straight off it went and back; off again in another direction and back; then in and out, round and round, utterly without hurry, until, taking a long leap down the steep hillside, the wily creature was off at an easy trot.

The hound did know what he was about. Across the valley, up the ridge, he worked his sure way, while I held my breath at his accuracy. Striking the woven circle at the top of the ridge, he began to weave in and out, back and forth, sniffling and whimpering like a tired child, beating gradually out into a wider and wider circle, and giving the fox all the rest it could want, before taking up the lead again and following on down the trail.

The hound knew what he was about; but so did the fox: the latter, moreover, taking the initiative, inventing the trick, leading the run, and so in the end not only escaping the hound, but also vastly widening the distance between their respective wits and abilities.

I recently witnessed a very interesting instance of this superiority of the fox. One of the best hunters in my neighborhood, a man widely known for the quality of his hounds, sold a dog, Gingles, an extraordinarily fine animal, to a hunter in a near-by town. The new owner brought his dog down here to try him out.

The hound was sent into the woods and was off in a moment on a warm trail. But it was not long before the baying ceased, and shortly after, back came the dog. The new owner was disappointed; but the next day he returned and started the dog again, only to have the same thing happen, the dog returning in a little while with a sheepish air of having been fooled. Over and over the trial was made, when, finally, the dog was taken back to its trainer as worthless.

Then both men came out with the dog, the trainer starting him on the trail and following on after him as fast as he could break his way through the woods. Suddenly, as in the trials before, the baying ceased, but before the baffled dog had had time to grow discouraged, the men came up to find him beating distractedly about in a small, freshly burned area among the bushes, his nose full of strong ashes, the trail hopelessly lost. With the help of the men the fox was dislodged, and the dog carried him on in a course that was to his new owner's entire satisfaction.

The fox jumped into the ashes to save himself. Just so have the swifts left the hollow trees and taken to my chimney, the phœbe to my pigpen, the swallow to my barn loft, the vireo to my lilac bush, the screech owls to my apple trees, the red squirrel for its nest to my ice-house, and the flat-nosed adder to the sandy knoll by my beehives. I have taken over from its wild inhabitants fourteen acres in Hingham; but, beginning with the fox, the largest of my wild creatures, and counting only what we commonly call "animals" (beasts, birds, and reptiles), there are dwelling with me, being fruitful and multiplying, here on this small plot of cultivated earth this June day, some seventy species of wild things — thirty-six in feathers, fourteen in furs (not reckoning in the muskrat on the other side of the road), twelve in scales, four in shells, nine in skins (frogs, newts, salamanders) — seventy-five in all.

Here is a multiple life going serenely and abundantly on in an environment whose utter change from the primeval is hardly exaggerated by phœbe's shift for a nest from a mossy ledge in the heart of the ancient woods to a joist close up against the hot roof of my pigpen behind the barn. From this very joist, however, she has already brought off two broods since March, one of four and one of five.

As long as pigpens endure, and that shall be as long as the human race endures, why should not the line of phœbes also endure? The case of the fox is not quite the same, for he needs more room than a pigpen; but as long as the domestic hen endures, if we will but give the fox half the chance we give to phœbe, he too shall endure.

I had climbed the footpath from the meadow late one autumn evening, and stood leaning back upon a short hay-fork, looking into the calm moonlight that lay over the frosted field, and listening to the hounds baying in the swamp far away to the west of me. You have heard at night the passing of a train beyond the mountains; the creak of thole-pins round a distant curve in the river; the closing of a barn door somewhere down the valley. The far-off cry of the hounds was another such friendly and human voice calling across the vast of the night.

How clear their cries and bell-like! How mellow in the distance, ringing on the rim of the moonlit sky, round the sides of a swinging silver bell! Their clanging tongues beat all in unison, the sound rising and falling through the rolling woodland and spreading like a curling wave as the pack broke into the open over the level meadows.

I caught myself picking out the individual voices as they spoke, for an instant, singly and unmistakable, under the wild excitement of the drive, then all together, a fiercer, faster chorus as the chase swept unhindered across the meadows.

What was that? A twig that broke, some brittle oak leaf that cracked in the path behind me! I held my breath as a soft sound of padded feet came up the path, as something stopped, breathed, came on — as into the moonlight, beyond the circle of shadow in which I stood, walked the fox.

The dogs were now very near and coming as swift as their eager legs could carry them. But I was standing still, so still that the fox did not recognize me as anything more than a stump.

No, I was more than a stump; that much he saw immediately. But how much more than a stump?

The dogs were coming. But what was I? The fox was curious, interested, and after trying to make me out from a distance, crept gingerly up and sniffed at my shoes!

But my shoes had been soaked for an hour in the dew of the meadow and seemed to tell him little. So he backed off, and sat down upon his tail in the edge of the pine-tree shadow to watch me. He might have outwatched me, though I kept amazingly still, but the hounds were crashing through the underbrush below, and he must needs be off. Getting carefully up, he trotted first this side of me, then that, for a better view, then down the path up which he had just come, and into the very throat of the panting clamor, when, leaping lightly aside over a pile of brush and stones, he vanished as the dogs broke madly about me.

Cool? It was iced! And it was a revelation to me of what may be the mind of Nature. I have never seen anything in the woods, never had a glimpse into the heart of Nature, that has given me so much confidence in the possibility of a permanent alliance between human life and wild life, in the long endurance yet of our vastly various animal forms in the midst of spreading farms and dooryards, as this deliberate dodge of the fox.

At heart Nature is always just as cool and deliberate, capable always of taking every advantage. She is not yet past the panic, and probably never will be; but no one can watch the change of age-long habits in the wild animals, their ready adaptability, their amazing resourcefulness, with any very real fears for what civilization may yet have in store for them so long as our superior wit is for, instead of against, them.

I have found myself present, more than once, at an emergency when only my helping hand could have saved; but the circumstances have seldom been due to other than natural causes — very rarely man-made. On the contrary, man-made conditions out of doors — the multiplicity of fences, gardens, fields, crops, trees, for the primeval uniformity of forest or prairie — are all in favor of greater variety and more abundance of wild life (except for the larger forms), because all of this means more kinds of foods, more sorts of places for lairs and nests, more paths and short cuts and chances for escape — all things that help preserve life.

One morning, about two weeks ago, I was down by the brook along the road, when I heard a pack of hounds that had been hunting in the woods all night, bearing down in my direction.

It was a dripping dawn, everything soaked in dew, the leaf edges beaded, the grass blades bent with wet, so that instead of creeping into the bushes to wait for the hunt to drive by, I hurried up the road to the steep gravel bank, climbed it and sat down, well out of sight, but where I could see a long stretch of the road.

On came the chase. I kept my eyes down the road at the spot where the trout brook turns at the foot of the slope, for here the fox, if on the meadow side of the brook, would be pretty sure to cross — and there he stood!

I had hardly got my eyes upon the spot, when out through a tangle of wild grapevine he wound, stopped, glanced up and down, then dug his heels into the dirt, and flew up the road below me and was gone.

He was a big fellow, but very tired, his coat full of water, his big brush heavy and dragging with the dripping dew. He was running a race burdened with a weight of fur almost equal to the weight of a full suit of water-soaked clothes upon a human runner; and he struck the open road as if glad to escape from the wallow of wet grass and thicket that had clogged his long course.

On came the dogs, very close upon him; and

I turned again to the bend in the brook to see them strike the road, when, flash, below me on the road, with a rush of feet, a popping of dew-laid dust, the fox! — back into the very jaws of the hounds! — Instead he broke into the tangle of grapevines out of which he had first come, just as the pack broke into the road from *behind* the mass of thick, ropy vines.

Those dogs hit the plain trail in the road with a burst of noise and speed that carried them through the cut below me in a howling gale, a whirlwind of dust, and down the hill and on.

Not one of the dogs came back. Their speed had carried them on beyond the point where the fox had turned in his tracks and doubled his trail, on so far that though I waited several minutes, not one of the dogs had discovered the trick to come back on the right lead.

If I had had a *gun!* Yes, but I did not. But if I *had* had a gun, it might have made no particular difference. Yet it is the gun that makes the difference — all the difference between much or little wild life — life that our groves and fields may have at our hands now, as once the forests and prairies had it directly from the hands of the Lord.

XIII

OUR CALENDAR

THERE are four red-lettered calendars about the house: one with the Sundays in red; one with Sundays and the legal holidays in red; one with the Thursdays in red,— Thursday being publication day for the periodical sending out the calendar, — and one, our own calendar, with several sorts of days in red — all the high festival days here on Mullein Hill, the last to be added being the Pup's birthday which falls on September 15.

Pup's Christian name is Jersey, — because he came to us from that dear land by express when he was about the size of two pounds of sugar, — an explanation that in no manner accounts for all we went through in naming him. The christening hung fire from week to week, everybody calling him anything, until New Year's. It had to stop here. Returning from the city New Year's day I found, posted on the stand of my table-lamp, the cognomen done in red, this declaration: —

> January 1, 1915
>
> No person can call Jersey any other name but JERSEY. If anybody calls him any other name but Jersey, exceeding five times a day he will have to clean out his coop two times a day.

This was as plain as if it had been written on the wall. Somebody at last had spoken, and not as the scribes, either.

We shall celebrate Jersey's first birthday September 15, and already on the calendar the day is red — red, with the deep deep red of our six hearts! He is just a dog, a little roughish-haired mixed Scotch-and-Irish terrier, not big enough yet to wrestle with a woodchuck, but able to shake our affections as he shakes a rat. And that is because I am more than half through with my fourscore years and this is my first dog! And the boys — this is their first dog, too, every stray and tramp dog that they have brought home, having wandered off again.

One can hardly imagine what that means exactly. Of course, we have had other things, chickens and pigs and calves, rabbits, turtles, bantams, the woods and fields, books and kindling — and I have had Her and the four boys, — the family that is,— till at times, I will say, I have not felt the need of anything more. But none of these things is a dog, not even the boys. A dog is one of man's primal needs. "We want a dog!" had been a kind of family cry until Babe's last birthday.

Some six months before that birthday Babe came to me and said: —

"Father, will you guess what I want for my birthday?"

"A new pair of skates with a key fore and aft," I replied.

"Skates in August!" he shouted in derision. "Try again."

"A fast-flyer sled with automatic steering-gear and an electric self-starter and stopper."

"No. Now, Father," — and the little face in its Dutch-cut frame sobered seriously, — "it 's something with four legs."

"A duck," I suggested.

"That has only *two*."

"An armadillo, then."

"No."

"A donkey."

"No."

"An elephant?"

"No."

"An alligator?"

"No."

"A h-i-p hip, p-o, po, hippo, p-o-t pot, hippopot, a hippopota, m-u-s mus—hippopotamus, *that's* what it is!"

This had always made him laugh, being the way, as I had told him, that I learned to spell when I went to school; but to-day there was something deep and solemn in his heart, and he turned away from my lightness with close-sealed lips, while his eyes, winking hard, seemed suspiciously open. I was half inclined to call him back and guess again. But had not every one of the four boys been making me guess at that four-legged thing since they could talk about birthdays? And were not the conditions of our living as unfit now for four-legged things as ever? Besides, they already had the cow and the pig and a hundred two-legged hens. More live stock was simply out of the question at present.

The next day Babe snuggled down beside me at the fire.

"Father," he said, "have you guessed yet?"

"Guessed what?" I asked.

"What I want for my birthday?"

"A nice little chair to sit before the fire in?"

"Horrors! a chair! why, I said a four-legged thing."

"Well, how many legs has a chair?"

"Father," he said, "has a rocking-chair four legs?"

"Certainly."

"Then it must have four feet, has n't it?"

"Cert— why — I — don't — know exactly about that," I stammered. "But if you want a rocking-chair for your birthday, you shall have it, feet or fins, four legs or two, though I must confess that I don't exactly know, according to legs, just where a rocking-chair does belong."

"I don't want any chair, nor anything else with wooden legs."

"What kind of legs, then?"

"Bone ones."

"Why! why! I don't know any bone-legged things."

"Bones with hair on them."

"Oh, you want a Teddybear—*you*, and coming eight! Well! Well! But Teddybears have wire legs, I think, instead of bone."

The set look settled once more on his little, square face and the talk ceased. But the fight was on. Day after day, week after week, he had me guessing—through all the living quadrupeds—through all the fossil forms—through many that the Lord did not make, but might have made, had Adam only known enough Greek and Latin to give them names. Gently, persistently, he kept me guessing as the far-off day drew near, though long since *my* only question had been—What breed? August came finally, and a few days before the 24th we started by automobile for New Jersey.

We were speeding along the road for Princeton when all four boys leaned forward from the back seat, and Babe, close in my ear, said:—

"Shall I have any birthday down here, Father?"

"Certainly."

"Have you guessed *what* yet?"

I blew the horn fiercely, opened up the throttle till the words were snatched from his teeth by the swirling dust behind and conversation was made impossible. Two days later, the birthday found us at Uncle Joe's.

Babe was playing with Trouble, the little Scotch-Irish terrier, when Uncle Joe and I came into the yard. With Trouble in his arms Babe looked up and asked: —

"Uncle Joe, could you guess what four-legged thing I want for my birthday?"

"You want a dog," said Uncle Joe, and I caught up the dear child in my arms and kept back his cries with kisses.

"And you shall have one, too, if you will give me three or four weeks to get him for you. Trouble here is the daddy of — goodness! I suppose he is — of I don't know how many little puppies — but a good many — and I am giving you one of them right now, for this birthday, only, you will wait till their mother weans them, of course?"

"Yes, yes, of course!"

And so it happened that several weeks later a tiny black-and-tan puppy with nothing much of a tail came through from New Jersey to Hingham to hearts that had waited for him very, very long.

Pup's birthday makes the seventh red-letter day of that kind on the calendar. These are only the beginning of such days, our own peculiar days when we keep tryst with ourselves, because in one way or another these days celebrate some trial or triumph, some deep experience of the soul.

There is Melon Day, for example, — a movable feast-day in August, if indeed it come so early, when we pick the first watermelon. That, you ask, a deep emotional experience, an affair of the soul?

This is Massachusetts, dear reader, and I hail from the melon fields of Jersey. Even there a watermelon, to him who is spiritually minded, who, walking through a field of the radiant orbs (always buy an elongated ellipsoid for a real melon), hears them singing as they shine — even to the Jerseyman, I say, the taste of the season's first melon is of something out of Eden before the fall. But here in Massachusetts, Ah, the cold I fight, the drought I fight, the worms I fight, the blight I fight, the striped bugs I fight, the will-to-die in the very vines themselves I fight, until at last (once it was the 7th of August!) the heart inside of one of the green rinds is red with ripeness, and ready to split at the sight of a knife, answering to the thump with a far-off, muffled thud, — the family, I say, when that melon is brought in crisp and cool from the dewy field, is prompt at breakfast, and puts a fervor into the doxology that morning deeper far than is usual for the mere manna and quail gathered daily at the grocer's.

We have been (once) to the circus, but that day is not in red. That is everybody's day, while the red-letter days on our calendar — Storm-Door-and-Double-Window Day, for instance; or the day close to Christmas when we begin, "Marley was dead, to begin with"; or the Day of the First Snow — these days are peculiarly, privately our own, and these are red.

XIV

THE FIELDS OF FODDER

IT is doubtless due to early associations, to the large part played by cornfields in my boyhood, that I cannot come upon one now in these New England farms without a touch of homesickness. It was always the autumn more than the spring that appealed to me as a child; and there was something connected with the husking and the shocking of the corn that took deeper hold upon my imagination than any other single event of the farm year, a kind of festive joy, something solemnly beautiful and significant, that to this day makes a field of corn in the shock not so much the substance of earth's bounty as the symbol of earth's life, or rather of life — here on the earth as one could wish it to be — lived to the end, and rich in corn, with its fodder garnered and set in order over a broad field.

Perhaps I have added touches to this picture since the days when I was a boy, but so far back as when I used to hunt out the deeply fluted cornstalks to turn into fiddles, it was minor notes I played — the notes of the wind coming over the field of corn-butts and stirring the loose blades as it moved among the silent shocks. I have more than a memory of mere corn, of heavy-eared stalks cut and shocked to shed the winter rain: that, and more, as of the sober end of something, the fulfillment of some solemn compact between us — between me and the fields and skies.

Is this too much for a boy to feel? Not if he is father to the man! I have heard my own small boys, with grave faces, announce that this is the 21st of June, the longest day of the year — as if the shadows were already lengthening, even across their morning way.

If my spirit should return to earth as a flower, it would come a four-o'clock, or a yellow evening primrose, for only the long afternoon shadows or falling twilight would waken and spread my petals. No, I would return an aster or a witch-hazel bush, opening after the corn is cut, the crops gathered, and the yellow leaves begin to come sighing to the ground.

At that word "sighing" many trusting readers will lay this essay down. They have had more than enough of this brand of pathos from their youth up.

> "The 'sobbing wind,' the 'weeping rain,'—
> 'T is time to give the lie
> To these old superstitious twain—
> That poets sing and sigh.
>
> "Taste the sweet drops, — no tang of brine,
> Feel them — they do not burn;
> The daisy-buds, whereon they shine,
> Laugh, and to blossoms turn"—

that is, in June they do; but do they in October? There are no daisies to laugh in October. A few late asters fringe the roadsides; an occasional bee hums loudly in among them; but there is no sound of laughter, and no shine of raindrops in the broken hoary seed-stalks that strew the way. If the daisy-buds *laugh*, — as surely they do in June, — why should not the wind sob and the rain weep — as surely they do — in October? There are days of shadow with the days of sunshine; the seasons have their moods, as we have ours, and why should one be accused of more sentiment than sense, and of bad rhetoric, too, in yielding to the spirit of the empty woods till the slow, slanting rain of October weeps, and the soughing wind comes sobbing through the trees?

Fall rain, fall steadily, heavily, drearily. Beat off the fading leaves and flatten them into shapeless patterns on the soaking floor. Fall and slant and flatten, and, if you will, weep. Blow wind, through the creaking branches, blow about the whispering corners; parley there outside my window; whirl and drive the brown leaves into hiding, and if I am sad, sigh with me and sob.

May one not indulge in gentle melancholy these closing days of autumn, and invite the weather in, without being taken to task for it? One should no more wish to escape from the sobering influence of the October days than from the joy of the June days, or the thrill in the wide wonder of the stars.

"If winds have wailed and skies wept tears,
To poet's vision dim,
'T was that his own sobs filled his ears,
His weeping blinded him"—

of course! And blessed is the man who finds winds that will wail with him, and skies that love him enough to weep in sympathy. It saves his friends and next of kin a great deal of perfunctory weeping.

There is no month in all the twelve as lovely and loved as October. A single, glorious June day is close to the full measure of our capacity for joy; but the heart can hold a month of melancholy and still ache for more. So it happens that June is only a memory of individual days, while October is nothing less than a season, a mood, a spirit, a soul, beautiful, pensive, fugitive. So much is already gone, so many things seem past, that all the gold of gathered crops and glory on the wooded hillsides only gild and paint the shadow that sleeps within the very sunshine of October.

In June the day itself was the great event. It is not so in October. Then its coming and going were attended with ceremony and splendor, the dawn with invisible choirs, the sunset with all the pageantry and pomp of a regal fête. Now the day has lessened, and breaks tardily and without a dawn, and with a blend of shadow quickly fades into the night. The warp of dusk runs through even its sunlit fabric from daybreak to dark.

It is this shadow, this wash of haze upon the flaming landscape, this screen of mist through which the sunlight sifts, that veils the face of the fields and softens, almost to sadness, the October mood of things.

For it is the inner mood of things that has changed as well as the outward face of things. The very heart of the hills feels it. The hush that fell with the first frost has hardly been broken. The blackened grass, the blasted vine, have not grown green again. No new buds are swelling, as after a late frost in spring. Instead, the old leaves on the limbs rattle and waver down; the cornfield is only an area of stubs and long lines of yellow shocks; and in the corners of the meadow fence stand clumps of flower-stalks, — joe-pye-weed, boneset, goldenrod, — bare and already bleaching; and deep within their matted shade, where the brook bends about an elder bush, a single amber pendant of the jewel-weed, to which a bumble-bee comes droning on wings so loud that a little hyla near us stops his pipe to listen!

There are other sounds, now that the shrill cry of the hyla is stilled — the cawing of crows beyond the wood, the scratching of a beetle in the crisp leaves, the cheep of a prying chickadee, the tiny chirrup of a cricket in the grass — remnants of sounds from the summer, and echoes as of single strings left vibrating after the concert is over and the empty hall is closed.

But how sweet is the silence! To be so far removed from sounds that one can hear a single cricket and the creeping of a beetle in the leaves! Life allows so little margin of silence nowadays. One cannot sit down in quiet and listen to the small voices; one is obliged to stand up — in a telephone booth, a pitiful, two-by-two oasis of silence in life's desert of confusion and din. If October brought one nothing else but this sweet refuge from noises it would be enough. For the silence of October, with its peculiar qualities, is pure balm. There is none of the oppressive stillness that precedes a severe storm, none of the ominous hush that falls before the first frost, none of the death-like lack of sound in a bleak snow-buried swamp or pasture, none of the awesome majesty of quiet in the movement of the midnight stars, none of the fearful dumbness of the desert, that muteness without bound or break, eternal — none of these qualities in the sweet silence of October. I have listened to all of these, and found them answering to mute tongues within my own soul, deep unto deep; but such moods are rare — moods that can meet death, that can sweep through the heavens with the constellations, and that can hold converse with the dumb, stirless desert; whereas the need for the healing and restoration found in the serene silence of October is frequent.

There are voices here, however, many of them; but all subdued, single, pure, as when the chorus stops, and some rare singer carries the air on, and up, and far away till it is only soul.

The joyous confusion and happy tumult of summer are gone; the mating and singing and fighting are over; the growing and working and watch-care done; the running even of the sap has ceased; the grip of the little twigs has relaxed, and the leaves, for very weight of peace, float off into the air, and all the wood, with empty hands, lies in the after-summer sun, and dreams.

With empty hands in the same warm sun I lie and dream. The sounds of summer have died away; but the roar of coming winter has not yet broken over the barriers of the north. Above my head stretches a fanlike branch of witch-hazel, its yellow leaves falling, its tiny, twisted flowers just curling into bloom. The snow will fall before its yellow straps have burned crisp and brown. But let it fall. It must melt again; for as long as these pale embers glow the icy hands of winter shall slip and lose their hold on the outdoor world.

And so I dream. The woods are at my back, the level meadow and wide fields of corn-fodder stretch away in front of me to a flaming ridge of oak and hickory. The sun is behind me over the woods, and the lazy air glances with every gauzy wing and flashing insect form that skims the sleepy meadow. But there is an unusual play of light over the grass, a glinting of threads that enmesh the air as if the slow-swinging wind were weaving gossamer of blown silk from the steeple-bush spindles through the slanting reeds of the sun.

It is not the wind that weaves; it is a multitude of small spiders. Here is one close to my face, out at the tip of a slender grass-stem, holding on with its fore legs and kicking out backward with its hind legs a tiny skein of web off into the air. The threads stream and sway and lengthen, gather and fill and billow, and tug at their anchorage till, caught in the dip of some wayward current, they lift the little aeronaut from his hangar and bear him away through the sky.

Long before we dreamed of flight, this little voyager was coasting the clouds. I can follow him far across the meadow in the cobweb basket as his filmy balloon floats shimmering over the meadow sea.

Who taught him navigation? By what compass is he steering? And where will he come to port? Perhaps his anchor will catch in a hardhack on the other side of the pasture; or perhaps some wild air-current will sweep him over the woodtops, over the Blue Hills, and bear him a hundred miles away. No matter. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and there is no port where the wind never blows.

Yet no such ship would dare put to sea except in this soft and sunny weather. The autumn seeds are sailing too — the pitching parachutes of thistle and fall dandelion and wild lettuce, like fleets of tiny yachts under sail — a breeze from a cut-over ridge in the woods blowing almost cottony with the soft down of the tall lettuce that has come up thick in the clearing.

As I watch the strowing of the winds, my melancholy slips away. One cannot lie here in the warm but unquickening sun, and see this sower crossing meadow and cornfield without a vision of waking life, of fields again all green where now stands the fodder, of woods all full of song as soon as this sowing and the sleeping of the seeds are done. The autumn wind goeth forth to sow, and with the most lavish of hands. He wings his seeds, and weights his seeds, he burrs them, rounds them, and angles them; they fly and fall, they sink and swim, they stick and shoot, they pass the millstones of the robins' gizzards for the sake of a chance to grow. They even lie in wait for me, plucking me by the coat-sleeve, fastening upon my trousers' leg and holding on until I have walked with them into my very garden. The cows are forced to carry them, the squirrel to hide them, the streams to whirl them on their foaming drift into places where no bird or squirrel or wayward breeze would go. Not a corner within the horizon but will get its needed seed, not a nook anywhere, from the wind-swept fodder-field to the deepest, darkest swamp, but will come to life and flower again with the coming spring.

The leaves are falling, the birds are leaving, most of them having already gone. Soon I shall hear the bugle notes of the last guard as the Canada geese go over, headed swift and straight for the South. And yonder stands the fodder, brown and dry, the slanting shocks securely tied against the beating rains. How can one be melancholy when one knows the meaning of the fodder, when one is able to find in it his faith in the seasons, and see in it the beauty and the wisdom which has been built into the round of the year?

To him who lacks this faith and understanding let me give a serene October day in the woods. Go alone, lie down upon a bank where you can get a large view of earth and sky. "One seems to get nearer to nature in the early spring days," says Mr. Burroughs. I think not, not if by nearer you mean closer to the heart and meaning of things. "All screens are removed, the earth everywhere speaks directly to you; she is not hidden by verdure and foliage." That is true; yet for most of us her lips are still dumb with the silence of winter. One cannot come close to bare, cold earth. There is only one flat, faded expression on the face of the fields in March; whereas in October there is a settled peace and sweetness over all the face of Nature, a fullness and a non-withholding in her heart that makes communication natural and understanding easy.

The sap is sinking in the trees, the great tides of life have turned, but so slowly do they run these soft and fragrant days that they seem almost still, as at flood. A blue jay is gathering acorns overhead, letting one drop now and then to roll out of sight and be planted under the mat of leaves. Troops of migrating warblers flit into and through the trees, talking quietly among themselves as they search for food, moving all the while — and to a fixed goal, the far-off South. Bob-white whistles from the fodder-field; the odor of ripened fox grapes is brought with a puff of wind from across the pasture; the smell of mint, of pennyroyal, and of sweet fern crisping in the sun. These are not the odors of death; but the fragrance of life's very essence, of life ripened and perfected and fit for storing till another harvest comes. And these flitting warblers, what are they but another sign of promise, another proof of the wisdom which is at the heart of things? And all this glory of hickory and oak, of sumac and creeper, of burning berries on dogwood and ilex and elder — this sunset of the seasons — but the preparation for another dawn?

If one would be folded to the breast of Nature, if one would be pressed to her beating heart, if one would feel the mother in the soul of things, let these October days find him in the hills, or where the river makes into some vast salt marsh, or underneath some ancient tree with fields of corn in shock and browning pasture slopes that reach and round themselves along the rim of the sky.

The sun circles warm above me; and up against the snowy piles of cloud a broad-winged hawk in lesser circles wheels and flings its piercing cry far down to me; a fat, dozy woodchuck sticks his head out and eyes me kindly from his burrow; and close over me, as if I too had grown and blossomed there, bends a rank, purple-flowered ironweed. We understand each other;

we are children of the same mother, nourished at the same abundant breast, the weed and I, and the woodchuck, and the wheeling hawk, and the piled-up clouds, and the shouldering slopes against the sky — I am brother to them all. And this is home, this earth and sky — these fruitful fields, and wooded hills, and marshes of reed and river flowing out to meet the sea. I can ask for no fairer home, none larger, none of more abundant or more golden corn. If aught is wanting, if just a tinge of shadow mingles with the rowan-scented haze, it is the early-falling twilight, the thought of my days, how short they are, how few of them find me with the freedom of these October fields, and how soon they must fade into November.

No, the thought of November does not disturb me. There is one glory of the sun and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also are the months and seasons. And if I watch closely I shall see that not only are the birds leaving, but the muskrats are building their winter lodges, the frogs are bedding, the buds putting on their thick, furry coats — life everywhere preparing for the cold. I need to take the same precaution, — even in my heart. I will take a day out of October, a day when the woods are aflame with color, when the winds are so slow that the spiders are ballooning, and lying where I can see them ascending and the parachute seeds go drifting by, I will watch until my eyes are opened to see larger and plainer things go by — the days with the round of labor until the evening; the seasons with their joyous waking, their eager living; their abundant fruiting, and then their sleeping — for they must needs sleep. First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear, and after that the field of fodder. If so with the corn and the seasons, why not so with life? And what of it all could be fairer or more desirable than its October? — to lie and look out over a sunlit meadow to a field of fodder cut and shocked against the winter with my own hands!

XV

GOING BACK TO TOWN

LABOR DAY, and school lunches begin to-morrow," She said, carefully drying one of the "Home Comforts" that had been growing dusty on an upper shelf since the middle of June.

She set the three tin lunch-boxes (two for the four boys and one for me) on the back of the stove and stood looking a moment at them.

"Are you getting tired of spreading us bread and butter?" I asked.

She made no reply.

"If you don't put us up our comforts this year, how are we going to dispose of all that strawberry jam and currant jelly?"

"I am not tired of putting up lunches," she answered. "I was just wondering if this year we ought not to go back to town. Four miles each way for the boys to school, and twenty each way for you. Are n't we paying a pretty high price for the hens and the pleasures of being snowed in?"

"An enormous price," I affirmed solemnly. "And we 've paid it now these dozen winters running. Let 's go into Boston and take that suite of wedge-shaped rooms we looked at last fall in Hotel Huntington, at the intersection of the Avenue and the railroad tracks. The boys can count freight cars until they are exhausted, and watch engines from their windows night and day."

"It is n't a light matter," she went on. "And we can't settle it by making it a joke. You need to be near your work; I need to be nearer human beings; the children need much more rest and freedom than these long miles to school and these many chores allow them."

"You 're entirely right, my dear, and this time we 'll do it. Our good neighbor here will take the cow; I 'll give the cabbages away, and send for 'Honest Wash' Curtis to come for the hens."

"But look at all this wild-grape jelly!" she exclaimed, turning to an array of forty-four little garnet jars which she had just covered with hot paraffin against the coming winter.

"And the thirteen bushels of potatoes," I broke in. "And the apples — there are going to be eight or ten barrels of prime Baldwins this year. And —"

But it never comes to an end — it never has yet, for as soon as we determine to do it, we feel that we can or not, just as we please. Simply deciding that we will move in yields us such an instant and actual city sojourn that we seem already to have been and are now gladly getting back to the country again.

So here we have stayed summer and winter, knowing that we ought to go back nearer my work so that I can do more of it; and nearer the center of social life so we can get more of it — life being pretty much lost that is not spent in working, or going, or talking! Here we have stayed even through the winters, exempt from public benefits, blessing ourselves, every time it snows on Saturday, that we are here and not there for our week ends, here within the "tumultuous privacy" of the storm and our own roaring fireplace, with our own apples and popcorn and books and selves; and when it snows on Monday wishing the weather would always temper itself and time itself to the peculiar needs of Mullein Hill — its length of back country road and automobile.

For an automobile is not a snow-plough, however much gasoline you give it. Time was when I rode a snow-plough and enjoyed it, as my Neighbor Jonas rides and enjoys his, feeling that he is plenty fast enough, as indeed he is, his sense of safety on the way, the absolute certainty (so far as there can be human certainty) of his arriving sometime, being compensation enough for the loss of those sensations of speed induced across one's diaphragm and over one's epidermis by the automobile.

Speeding is a disease of the hair follicles, I think, and the great hallucination of haste under which we move and try to have a being is seated in the muscles of the diaphragm. Have I not found myself rushing for a hundred places by automobile that I never should have started for at all by hayrick or snow-plough, and thus had saved myself that time wholly? Space is Time's tail and we can't catch it. The most we can catch, with the speediest car, is a sight of its tip going around the corner ahead.

Speed is contagious, and I fear that I have it. I moved away here into Hingham to escape it, but life in the Hingham hills is not far enough away to save a man from all that passes along the road. The wind, too, bloweth where it listeth, and when there is infection on it, you can't escape by hiding in Hingham — not entirely. And once the sporulating speed germs get into your system, it is as if Anopheles had bitten you, their multiplying and bursting into the blood occurring regularly, accompanied by a chill at two cylinders and followed by a fever for four; a chill at four and a fever for six — eight — twelve, just like malaria!

We all have it, all but Neighbor Jonas. He has instead a "stavin'" good mare by the name of Bill. Bill is speedy. She sprang, years ago, from fast stock, as you would know if you held the cultivator behind her. When she comes to harrow the garden, Jonas must needs come with her to say "Whoa!" all the way, and otherwise admonish and exhort her into remembering that the cultivator is not a trotting-sulky, and that a row of beets is not a half-mile track. But the hard highways hurt Bill's feet, so that Jonas nowadays takes every automobile's dust, and none too sweetly either.

"Jonas," I said, as Bill was cooling off at the end of a row, "why don't you get an automobile?"

"I take the eggs down to the store every two weeks and get a shave; but I don't need a car much, havin' Bill," he replied, smashing a vicious greenhead on Bill's withers that was keeping her mixed up with the traces and the teeth of the harrow. "Besides, they 're skittish, nervous things compared with a hoss. What I 'd like is something neither one nor t' other — a sort of cross between an auto and Bill."

"Why not get a Ford car, then," I asked, "with a cultivator attachment? It would n't step on as many hills in the row as Bill does, and I think it would beat Bill on the road."

There was a cluck, a jump, and we were off down another row, with Jonas saying: —

"Not yet. Bill is still fast enough for me."

And for me, too; yet there is no denying that conditions have changed, that a multitude of new ills have been introduced into the social organism by the automobile, and except in the deep drifts of winter, the Ford car comes nearer curing those ills than any other anti-toxin yet discovered.

But here are the drifts still; and here is the old question of going back to the city to escape them. I shall sometimes wish we had gone back as I start out on a snowy, blowy morning; but never at night as I turn back — there is that difference between going to the city and going home. I often think the trip in is worth while for the sake of the trip out, such joy is it to pull in from the black, soughing woods to the cheer of the house, stamping the powdery snow off your boots and greatcoat to the sweet din of welcomes that drown the howling of the wind outside.

Once last winter I had to walk from the station. The snow was deep and falling steadily when I left the house in the morning, with increasing wind and thickening storm all day, so that my afternoon train out was delayed and dropped me at the station long after dark.

The roads were blocked, the snow was knee-deep, the driving wind was horizontal, and the whirling ice particles like sharp sand, stinging, blinding as I bent to the road.

I went forward leaning, the drag in my feet overcome by the pull of the level wind on my slant body. Once through the long stretch of woods I tried to cut across the fields. Here I lost my bearings, stumbled into a ditch, and for a moment got utterly confused with the black of the night, the bite of the cold, and the smothering hand of the wind on my mouth.

Then I sat down where I was to pull myself together. There might be danger in such a situation, but I was not really cold — not cool enough. I had been forcing the fight foolishly, head-on, by a frontal attack instead of on the enemy's flank.

Here in the meadow I was exposed to the full force of the sweeping gale, and here I realized for the first time that this was the great storm of the winter, one of the supreme passages of the year, and one of the glorious physical fights of a lifetime.

On a prairie, or in the treeless barrens and tundras of the vast, frozen North, a fight like this could have but one end. What must the wild polar night be like! What the will, the thrill of men like Scott and Peary who have fought these forces to a standstill at the very poles! Their craft, their cunning, their daring, their imagination! The sway, the drive, the divine madness of such a purpose! A living atom creeping across the ice-cap over the top of the world! A human mote, so smothered in the Arctic dark and storm, so wide of the utmost shore of men, by a trail so far and filled and faint that only God can follow!

It is not what a man does, but what he lives through doing it. Life may be safer, easier, longer, and fuller of possessions in one place than another. But possessions do not measure life, nor years, nor ease, nor safety. Life in the Hingham hills in winter is wretchedly remote at times, but nothing happens to me all day long in Boston to be compared for a moment with this experience here in the night and snow. I never feel the largeness of the sky there, nor the wideness of the world, nor the loveliness of night, nor the fearful majesty of such a winter storm.

As the far-flung lines swept down upon me and bore me back into the drift, I knew somewhat the fierce delight of berg and floe and that primordial dark about the poles, and springing from my trench, I flung myself single-handed and exultant against the double fronts of night and storm, mightier than they, till weak, but victorious, I dragged myself to the door of a neighboring farmhouse, the voice of the storm a mighty song within my soul.

This happened, as I say, *once* last winter, and of course she said we simply ought *not* to live in such a place in winter; and of course, if anything exactly like that should occur every winter night, I should have to move into the city whether I liked city storms or not. One's life is, to be sure, a consideration, but fortunately for life all the winter days out here are not so magnificently ordered as this, except at dawn each morning, and at dusk, and at midnight when the skies are set with stars.

But there is a largeness to the quality of country life, a freshness and splendor as constant as the horizon and a very part of it.

Take a day anywhere in the year: that day in March — the day of the first frogs, when spring and winter meet; or that day in the fall — the day of the first frost, when autumn and winter meet;

or that day in August — the day of the full-blown goldenrod, when summer and autumn meet — *these*, together with the days of June, and more especially that particular day in June when you can't tell earth from heaven, when everything is life and love and song, and the very turtles of the pond are moved from their lily-pads to wander the upland slopes to lay — the day when spring and summer meet!

Or if these seem rare days, try again anywhere in the calendar from the rainy day in February when the thaw begins to Indian summer and the day of floating thistledown, and the cruising fleets of wild lettuce and silky-sailed fireweed on the golden air. The big soft clouds are sailing their wider sea; the sweet sunshine, the lesser winds, the chickadees and kinglets linger with you in your sheltered hollow against the hill — you and they for yet a little slumber, a little sleep before there breaks upon you the wrath of the North.

But is this sweet, slumberous, half-melancholy day any nearer perfect than that day when

> "Announced by all the trumpets of the sky
> Arrives the snow" —

or the blizzard?

But going back to town, as she intimated, concerns the children quite as much as me. They travel eight miles a day to get to school, part of it on foot and part of it by street car — and were absent one day last year when the telephone wires were down and we thought there would be no school because of the snow. They might not have missed that one day had we been in the city, and I must think of that when it comes time to go back. There is room for them in the city to improve in spelling and penmanship too, vastly to improve. But they could n't have half so much fun there as here, nor half so many things to do, simple, healthful, homely, interesting things to do, as good for them as books and food and sleep — these last things to be had here, too, in great abundance.

What could take the place of the cow and hens in the city? The hens are Mansie's (he is the oldest) and the cow is mine. But night after night last winter I would climb the Hill to see the barn lighted, and in the shadowy stall two little human figures — one squat on an upturned bucket milking, his milk-pail, too large to be held between his knees, lodged perilously under the cow upon a half-peck measure; the other little human figure quietly holding the cow's tail.

No head is turned; not a squeeze is missed — this is *business* here in the stall, — but as the car stops behind the scene, Babe calls —

"Hello, Father!"

"Hello, Babe!"

"Three teats done," calls Mansie, his head down, butting into the old cow's flank. "You go right in, we 'll be there. She has n't kicked but once!"

Perhaps that is n't a good thing for those two little boys to do — watering, feeding, brushing, milking the cow on a winter night in order to save me — and loving to! Perhaps that is n't a good thing for me to see them doing, as I get home from the city on a winter night!

But I am a sentimentalist and not proof at all against two little boys milking, who are liable to fall into the pail.

Meantime the two middlers had shoveled out the road down to the mail-box on the street so that I ran up on bare earth, the very wheels of the car conscious of the love behind the shovels, of the speed and energy it took to get the long job done before I should arrive.

"How did she come up?" calls Beebum as he opens the house door for me, his cheeks still glowing with the cold and exercise.

"Did we give you wide enough swing at the bend?" cries Bitsie, seizing the bag of bananas.

"Oh, we sailed up — took that curve like a bird — did n't need chains — just like a boulevard right into the barn!"

"It's a fearful night out, is n't it?" she says, taking both of my hands in hers, a touch of awe, a note of thankfulness in her voice.

"Bad night in Boston!" I exclaim. "Trains late, cars stalled — streets blocked with snow. I'm mighty glad to be out here a night like this."

"Woof! Woof!" — And Babe and Pup are at the kitchen door with the pail of milk, shaking themselves free from snow.

"Where is Mansie?" his mother asks.

"He just ran down to have a last look at his chickens."

We sit down to dinner, but Mansie does n't come. The wind whistles outside, the snow sweeps up against the windows, — the night grows wilder and fiercer.

"Why does n't Mansie come?" his mother asks, looking at me.

"Oh, he can't shut the hen-house doors, for the snow. He 'll be here in a moment."

The meal goes on.

"Will you go out and see what is the matter with the child?" she asks, the look of anxiety changing to one of alarm on her face.

As I am rising there is a racket in the cellar and the child soon comes blinking into the lighted dining-room, his hair dusty with snow, his cheeks blazing, his eyes afire. He slips into his place with just a hint of apology about him and reaches for his cup of fresh, warm milk.

He is twelve years old.

"What does this mean, Mansie?" she says.

"Nothing."

"You are late for dinner. And who knows what had happened to you out there in the trees a night like this. What were you doing?"

"Shutting up the chickens."

"But you did shut them up early in the afternoon."

"Yes, mother."

"Well?"

"It 's awful cold, mother!"

"Yes?"

"They might freeze!"

"Yes?"

"Specially those little ones."

"Yes, I know, but what took you so long?"

"I did n't want 'em to freeze."

"Yes?"

"So I took a little one and put it on the roost in between two big hens — a little one and a big one, a little one and a big one, to keep the little ones warm; and it took a lot of time."

"Will you have another cup of warm milk?" she asks, pouring him more from the pitcher, doing very well with her lips and eyes, it seemed to me, considering how she ran the cup over.

Shall I take them back to the city for the winter — away from their chickens, and cow and dog and pig and work-bench and haymow and fireside, and the open air and their wild neighbors and the wilder nights that I remember as a child?

> "There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
> There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
> There is society where none intrudes,
> By the deep sea — and music in its roar."

Once they have known all of this I can take them into town and not spoil the poet in them.

"Make our boy interested in natural history if you can. It is better than games. Keep him in the open air. Above all, you must guard him against indolence. Make him a strenuous man. The great God has called me. Take comfort in that I die in peace with the world and myself and not afraid"—from the last letter of Captain Scott to his wife, as he lay watching the approach of death in the Antarctic cold. His own end was nigh, but the infant son, in whose life he should never take a father's part, what should be his last word for him?

"Make our boy interested in natural history if you can. It is better than games. Keep him in the open air."

Those are solemn words, and they carry a message of deep significance. I have watched my own boys; I recall my own boyhood; and I believe the words are true. So thoroughly do I believe in the physical and moral value of the outdoors for children, the open fields and woods, that before my children were all born I brought them here into the country. Here they shall grow as the weeds and flowers grow, and in the same fields with them; here they shall play as the young foxes and woodchucks play, and on the same bushy hillsides with them — summer and winter.

Games are natural and good. It is a stick of a boy who won't be "it." But there are better things than games, more lasting, more developing, more educating. Kittens and puppies and children play; but children should have, and may have, other and better things to do than puppies and kittens can do; for they are not going to grow up into dogs and cats.

Once awaken a love for the woods in the heart of a child, and something has passed into him that the evil days, when they come, shall have to reckon with. Let me take my children into the country to live, if I can. Or if I cannot, then let me take them on holidays, or, if it must be, on Sunday mornings with me, for a tramp.

I bless those Sunday-morning tramps to the Tumbling Dam Woods, to Sheppard's Mills, to Cubby Hollow, to Cohansey Creek Meadows, that I was taken upon as a lad of twelve. We would start out early, and deep in the woods, or by some pond or stream, or out upon the wide meadows, we would wait, and watch the ways of wild things — the little marsh wrens bubbling in the calamus and cattails, the young minks at play, the big pond turtles on their sunning logs — these and more, a multitude more. Here we would eat our crackers and the wild berries or buds that we could find, and with the sunset turn back toward home.

We saw this and that, single deep impressions, that I shall always remember. But better than any single sight, any sweet sound or smell, was the sense of companionship with my human guide, and the sense that I loved

> "not man the less, but nature more,
> From these our interviews."

If we *do* move into town this winter, it won't be because the boys wish to go.

XVI

THE CHRISTMAS TREE

WE shall not go back to town before Christmas, any way. They have a big Christmas tree on the Common, but the boys declare they had rather have their own Christmas tree, no matter how small; rather go into the woods and mark it weeks ahead, as we always do, and then go bring it home the day before, than to look at the tallest spruce that the Mayor could fetch out of the forests of Maine and set up on the Common. Where do such simple-minded children live, and in such primitive conditions that they can carry an axe into the woods these days and cut their own Christmas tree? Here on the Hills of Hingham, almost twenty miles from Boston.

I hope it snows this Christmas as it did last. How it snowed! All day we waited a lull in the gale, for our tree was still uncut, still out in the Shanty-Field Woods. But all day long it blew, and all day long the dry drifts swirled and eddied into the deep hollows and piled themselves across the ridge road into bluffs and headlands that had to be cut and tunneled through. As the afternoon wore on, the storm steadied. The wind came gloriously through the tall woods, driving the mingled snow and shadow till the field and the very barn were blotted out.

"We *must* go!" was the cry. "We'll have no Christmas tree!"

"But this is impossible. We could never carry it home through all this, even if we could find it."

"But we've marked it!"

"You mean you have devoted it, hallowed it, you little Aztecs! Do you think the tree will mind?"

"Why — yes. Would n't you mind, father, if you were a tree and marked for Christmas and nobody came for you?"

"Perhaps I would — yes, I think you're right. It is too bad. But we'll have to wait."

We waited and waited, and for once they went to bed on Christmas Eve with their tree uncut. They had hardly gone, however, when I took the axe and the lantern (for safety) and started up the ridge for the devoted tree. I found it; got it on my shoulder; and long after nine o'clock — as snowy and as weary an old Chris as ever descended a chimney — came dragging in the tree.

We got to bed late that night — as all parents ought on the night before Christmas; but Old Chris himself, soundest of sleepers, never slept sounder! And what a Christmas Day we had. What a tree it was! Who got it? How? No, old Chris did n't bring it — not when two of the boys came floundering in from a walk that afternoon saying they had tracked me from the cellar door clear out to the tree-stump — where they found my axe!

I hope it snows. Christmas ought to have snow; as it ought to have holly and candles and stockings and mistletoe and a tree. I wonder if England will send us mistletoe this year? Perhaps we shall have to use our home-grown; but then, mistletoe is mistletoe, and one is n't asking one's self what kind of *mistletoe* hangs overhead when one chances to get under the chandelier. They tell me there are going to be no toys this year, none of old Chris's kind but only weird, fierce, Fourth-of-July things from Japan. "Christmas comes but once a year," my elders used to say to me — a strange, hard saying; yet not so strange and hard as the feeling that somehow, this year, Christmas may not come at all. I never felt that way before. It will never do; and I shall hang up my stocking. Of course they will have a tree at church for the children, as they did last year, but will the choir sing this year, "While shepherds watched their flock by night" and "Hark! the herald angels sing"?

I have grown suddenly old. The child that used to be in me is with the ghost of Christmas Past, and I am partner now with Scrooge, taking old Marley's place. The choir may sing; but —

> "The lonely mountains o'er
> And the resounding shore
> A voice of weeping heard and loud lament!"

I cannot hear the angels, nor see, for the flames of burning cities, their shining ranks descend the sky.

> "No war, or battle's sound,
> Was heard the world around ;
> The idle spear and shield were high uphung"

on that first Christmas Eve. What has happened since then — since I was a child? — since last Christmas, when I still believed in Christmas, and sang with the choir, "Noel! Noel!"?

But I am confusing sentiment and faith. If I cannot sing peace on earth, I still believe in it; if I cannot hear the angels, I know that the Christ was born, and that Christmas is coming. It will not be a very merry Christmas; but it shall be a most significant, most solemn, most holy Christmas.

The Yule logs, as the Yule-tide songs, will be fewer this year. Many a window, bright with candles a year ago, will be darkened. There will be no goose at the Cratchits', for both Bob and Master Cratchit have gone to the front. But Tiny Tim is left, and the Christ Child is left, and my child is left, and yours — even your dear dream-child "upon the tedious shores of Lethe" that always comes back at Christmas. It takes only one little child to make Christmas — one little child, and the angels who companion him, and the shepherds who come to see him, and the Wise Men who worship him and bring him gifts.

We can have Christmas, for unto us again, as truly as in Bethlehem of Judea, a child is born on whose shoulders shall be the government and whose name is the Prince of Peace.

Christ is reborn with every child, and Christmas is his festival. Come, let us keep it for his sake; for the children's sake; for the sake of the little child that we must become before we can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. It is neither kings nor kaisers, but a little child that shall lead us finally. And long after the round-lipped cannons have ceased to roar, we shall hear the Christmas song of the Angels.

"But see! the Virgin blest
Hath laid her Babe to rest —"

Come, softly, swiftly, dress up the tree, hang high the largest stockings; bring out the toys — softly!

I hope it snows.

THE END

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